



# Association of Social Anthropologists

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## of the UK

### **Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK (ASA) Ethical Guidelines 2021 for good research practice**

#### **1. Preamble**

Social anthropologists carry out their professional research in many places around the world; some, where they are 'at home', and others, where they are in some way 'foreign'. Anthropological scholarship occurs within a variety of economic, cultural, legal and political settings. As professionals and as citizens, they need to consider the effects of their involvement with, and consequences of, their work for: the individuals and groups among whom they conduct their fieldwork; their colleagues and the discipline; collaborating researchers and partner organisations; sponsors, funders, employers and gatekeepers; their own and host governments; and other interest groups and the wider society in the countries in which they work. The scope of anthropology also includes non-human animals, the wider environment and cyberspace, and see [ASA Ethics Guidelines Additional Resources](#) and the [Ethical Guidelines for the Association of Internet Researchers](#). Ethical, personal and legal dilemmas occur at all stages of research: in the selection of topic, area or population, choice of sponsor and source of funding, in negotiating access, making research agreements and while conducting fieldwork. These ethical dilemmas extend to the interpretation and analysis of results, the publication of findings and representation, and the storage and/or disposal of data. Ethics Committees are therefore encouraged to recognise the diversity and complexity of methods of ethnographic research, and to consider, for example, how practices around informed consent and the development of research materials may differ from the approaches of other disciplines.

Anthropologists, like other social researchers, are faced increasingly with competing duties, obligations and potential conflicts of interest, with the need to make implicit or explicit choices between their own values and between the interests of different individuals and groups. As anthropologists may work with colleagues from other disciplines and with partner organisations, they may not be the sole arbiter of ethical conduct on a study. The weight of responsibility for adherence to good ethical conduct lies with the anthropological researcher, while recognising at the same time that casualization in Higher Education may challenge the autonomy and agency of anthropologists working in junior positions in larger teams. Anthropologists have a responsibility to anticipate problems and, insofar as is possible, to resolve them without harming the research community. They should do their utmost to ensure that they leave a research field in a state which permits future access by other researchers. As members of a discipline committed to the pursuit of knowledge and the public disclosure of findings, they should strive to maintain integrity in the conduct of anthropological research.

The Association has adopted the following set of ethical guidelines to which anthropologists and those interested in anthropologically informed research practice, and reviewers of anthropological research, are encouraged to use. They follow the educational model for professional codes, alerting researchers to issues that raise ethical concerns or to potential problems and conflicts of interests that might arise in the research process, recognising the limitations of abstractly-formulated ethical principles to guide concrete ethical practice (see Verhallen et al. 2016). The principles are intended to guide anthropologists to consider ethics not only while designing and gaining approval for fieldwork but throughout their research. Please see [ASA Ethics Guidelines Additional Resources](#) for further reading on this subject.

These Guidelines highlight the following issues as particularly relevant to anthropologists conducting ethnographic research, and we use these themes to structure the following sections, starting with **Participant observation**, obtaining **Consent** and issues of **Confidentiality and anonymity** in research. Recognising **Responsibilities** and maintaining **Relationships** are a vital dimension of the ethical conduct of research and these are explored in relations to: **Participants; Sponsors, funders and employers; Colleagues and the discipline; and Government and society.**

## 2. Participant observation

Ethnographic methods are the dominant modes through which data are generated and theories are developed. Ethnographic methods are diverse and include long or short-term fieldwork in single or multiple sites, perhaps involving repeated visits. Within fieldwork, participant observation has been considered by anthropologists as one of the core methods. This is a holistic method of research that requires an appropriate period of time in the field and can be conducted with a wide variety of communities and groups. The contexts for research can include economic, political, legal, medical settings and concerns as well as religious, gender, and kinship dimensions, among many others. Participant observation is inductive and has the potential for uncovering unexpected links between different domains of social life. Accordingly, a degree of flexibility in research design that allows modification of topic focus following the initial formulation of a research question is required.

Participant observation includes engagement with, and observation of, various forms of participatory activities specific to the group being studied in both public and private settings. Anthropologists are expected to maintain a reasonable expectation of privacy for participants and to avoid including details that could mean that research participants/ interlocutors become easily identifiable to others. Fieldwork is also carried out by means of: casual conversations with a wide range of participants, some of whom are well-known and seen regularly, others during fleeting encounters; interviews, usually open-ended, qualitative and in-depth; surveys; and audio and video recordings, which are sometimes supplemented by subsequent co-viewing with participants. The methods can vary from the informal and unstructured, such as participant observation and conversations, through to structured methods that include, but are not limited to, interviews, surveys, audio-visual recordings.

Participant observation involves certain key ethical principles:

### 2.1 *Transparency of research*

Whenever reasonably practicable, participants should be made aware of the presence and purpose of the researcher. Researchers should inform participants of their research in the most appropriate way depending on the context of the research. Care should be taken not to infringe uninvited upon the private spaces (as locally defined) of an individual or group.

### *2.2 Fieldnotes and personal data*

Fieldnotes and other forms of personal data are predominantly private, barring legal exceptions. Anthropologists have a duty to protect all original records of their research from unauthorised access. This is the most important way in which confidentiality and the anonymity of participants is ensured. They also have a duty to ensure that nothing that they publish or otherwise make public, through textual or audio-visual media, would permit identification of individuals where their welfare or security is jeopardised. See Section 3 on **Consent** and Section 4 on **Confidentiality and Anonymity** for more guidance.

### *2.3 The flexible and responsive nature of fieldwork*

It should be recognised that any data collection instruments submitted for ethical approval in advance of fieldwork are likely to be modified and possibly re-designed during fieldwork. This should be made clear on any submitted outlines to a reviewing body, with reference to the wider peer-reviewed literature on participant observation and anthropological enquiry where appropriate.

### *2.4 Engaging with participants*

Depending on the nature of the project, the researcher may be able to provide only rough approximations of the numbers and characteristics of the participants they will observe or converse with during fieldwork, how people will be recruited and some of the likely scenarios in which consent will be sought. It should be clear that any statements submitted as part of an application for ethical review concerning sampling, recruitment and participant demographics etc. may only be indicative, given the inductive and responsive nature of anthropological inquiry. If the committee is likely to be unfamiliar with anthropological fieldwork, then these statements can be explained more fully to a non-specialist reviewer and referenced with published literature where appropriate to support the case.

## **3. Consent**

Inquiries involving human subjects should be based on the freely given informed consent of participants. The principle of informed consent expresses the belief in the need for truthful and respectful exchanges between social researchers and the people with whom they study. Consent made after the research is completed and publicly made available is not meaningful consent. Where participants are compelled (e.g., by their employer or government or other forms of authority) to participate in research, consent cannot be said to have been meaningfully given by subjects, and anthropologists are advised not to pursue that piece of work. Please also see [ASA Ethics Guidelines Additional Resources](#) for further reading on this subject.

### *3.1 Informed consent*

Negotiating consent entails communicating information likely to be material to a person's willingness to participate, such as: the purpose(s) of the study and the anticipated consequences of the research; the identity of funders and sponsors; the anticipated uses of the data; possible benefits of the study and harm or discomfort that might affect participants; issues relating to data storage and security; and including limits to the degree of anonymity and confidentiality which may be afforded to informants and subjects. These can be communicated verbally, particularly to those participants with whom the anthropologist has close and continuing relations. The long period over which anthropologists make use of their data and the possibility that unforeseen uses or theoretical interests may arise in the future may need to be conveyed to participants and to

sponsoring bodies, as should any likelihood that the data may be shared (in some form) with other colleagues or be made available to sponsors, funders or other interested parties, or deposited in archives.

### *3.2 Consent in public places and/or large events*

Many of those participating in public events observed by anthropologists could be unwitting research participants, for example strangers visiting the community of study or participants in large protests that are studied by the anthropologist. Here the term 'community' is used to refer not only to neighbourhoods but organisations such as government agencies, hospitals or to mobile groups, such as pastoral and nomadic groups, refugees or expatriate and corporate elites who move around to other places. In all cases, anthropologists should take all practicable steps to be introduced to people by local participants and identify themselves as a researcher. Covert research is only acceptable in rare instances where research is conducted in profoundly hostile contexts, where revealing their presence might endanger the anthropologist's or others' lives.

### *3.3 Consent to be filmed or photographed*

Any filming or photography should always be overt, and wherever possible individual consent should be sought. If individual consent is not possible, researchers should avoid compromising people's identities or security in any public presentations of the material through judicious editing. Under the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988), researchers making audio or video recordings should obtain 'copyright clearance' from interviewees if recordings are to be publicly broadcast or deposited in public archives. Any restrictions on use (e.g. embargo period) or other conditions (e.g. preservation of anonymity) which the interviewee requires should be recorded in writing or as an audio-visual record of oral consent. This is best done at the time of the recording as retrospective clearance is often time-consuming or impossible where the interviewee is deceased or has moved away.

### *3.4 Verbal and proxy consent*

Many of the communities studied by anthropologists are highly suspicious of formal bureaucratic procedures and administration. Requests for signatures on printed forms may arouse suspicion and therefore standard procedures for obtaining written consent may be problematic. In such cases, it is appropriate to obtain informed verbal consent. When working with children and young persons under the age of consent, participants with limited literacy or with learning difficulties, it may be appropriate to discuss their consent with friends, family, carers or other trusted acquaintances who may give sole or additional 'proxy' consent for the participant.

### *3.5 Consent via gatekeepers*

In some situations, consent needs to be sought from individual gatekeepers such as community leaders, spokespersons and officials or from collective decision-making bodies such as community or neighbourhood assemblies. Where access to participants is controlled by a national or local gatekeeper, researchers should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from subjects once access has been gained. They should be wary of inadvertently disturbing the relationship between subjects and gatekeepers since that will continue long after the researcher has left the field.

### *3.6 Additional clarification and consent*

Interviewers should clarify before interviewing the extent to which participants may see transcripts of interviews, and field notes and to alter the content, withdraw statements, provide

additional information or to add to interpretations. Clarification should also be given to participants regarding the degree to which they will be consulted prior to publication.

### *3.7 Data sharing and consent*

Participants need to be informed, and to consent, if their raw or processed data is to be shared with colleagues both within and outside the named research team, or with organisations and/or communities.

## **4. Confidentiality and anonymity**

Research participants have the right to remain anonymous and their privacy and confidentiality respected especially in publications. However, anthropologists should recognise that participants may wish to have their names included, even in publications, and this should not be denied to them in the name of ethics. Privacy and confidentiality present anthropologists with particularly difficult problems given the cultural and legal variations between societies. If guarantees of privacy and confidentiality are made, they should be honoured unless there are clear and overriding ethical reasons not to do so. Confidential information should be treated as such by the anthropologist even when it enjoys no legal protection or privilege, and other people who have access to the data should likewise be made aware of their obligations. Conversely, participants should be made aware that it is rarely, if at all, legally possible to ensure total confidentiality or to completely protect the privacy of records. Anthropologists should similarly respect the measures taken by other researchers to maintain the anonymity of their research field and participants, and other promises made as part of the consent process when using other researchers' material. Please see [ASA Ethics Guidelines Additional Resources](#) for further reading on this subject.

### *4.1 Anonymisation and use of pseudonyms*

As far as is possible researchers should anticipate potential threats to confidentiality and anonymity. They should consider whether it is necessary even as a matter of propriety to record certain information at all and take appropriate measures relating to the storage and security of records during and after fieldwork. Where appropriate, such means as the removal of identifiers, the use of pseudonyms and other technical solutions to the problems of confidentiality and privacy in field records and in oral and written forms of data dissemination can be applied, whether or not this is enjoined by law or administrative regulation.

### *4.2 The limits of confidentiality/ anonymisation*

Researchers should endeavour to anticipate problems likely to compromise anonymity in publications; but they should make clear to participants that it may not be possible in field notes and other records or publications totally to conceal identities, and that the anonymity afforded or promised to individuals, families or other groups may also be unintentionally compromised. A particular configuration of attributes can frequently identify an individual beyond reasonable doubt; and it is particularly difficult to disguise, say, office holders, organizations, public agencies, ethnic groups, religious denominations or other collectives without so distorting the data as to compromise scholarly accuracy and integrity.

### *4.3 Confidentiality and data sharing*

If raw, or even processed data is to be shared with colleagues or communities for analysis or the preparations of publications, or deposited in data archives or libraries, care should be taken not to

breach privacy and guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity made through the consent process, and appropriate safeguards should be devised.

#### *4.4 Confidentiality and archives*

Fieldnotes and other data should not be archived in raw form if this infringes either the promise of confidentiality and anonymity made to participants, or the stated reasons for the research on which informed consent was agreed. Extended embargo periods may provide a way of securing the material for future researchers, including those from source communities, while honouring present commitments. In the longer term, it might be proper to make available fieldnotes and other research material for use by other researchers e.g. by including them in relevant archives. Anthropologists should make this clear when negotiating informed consent. Anthropologists should be aware that they might not always be able to protect their fieldnotes and care must be taken as to how research information and data is recorded and stored.

#### *4.5 Confidentiality and wider regulations (e.g. GDPR)*

Recent pan-European changes to data protection laws have explicit provision to safeguard personal data while enabling academic research. Anthropologists should note the following: the recommended GDPR ground for data processing is a task in the public interest. Pseudonymisation is a safe default: use pseudonyms in publications but retain actual identities in notes etc. The notes therefore have to be managed very carefully since they contain personal data but long-term storage and eventual archiving is entirely proper within the terms of the GDPR (see Article 6(4); Recital 50 and article 5(1)(b) and(e), Article 89(1) d). That is, there is nothing in the GDPR that prevents researchers from storing personal data indefinitely, as long as it is warranted by the research and appropriate safeguards are in place to protect.

### **5. Relations and responsibilities - research participants**

The close association of anthropologists with the communities/cultures/societies among whom they carry out research entails personal and moral relationships, trust and reciprocity between the researcher and research participants; it also entails recognition of power differentials between them. As far as is possible anthropologists should involve the people from the communities/cultures/ societies being studied in the planning and execution of research projects. They should recognise that their obligations to the participants or the host community may not end, indeed many would argue should not end, with the completion of their fieldwork or research project.

Anthropologists should be aware of the intrusive potential of some of their enquiries and methods. Like other social researchers, they have no special entitlement to study all phenomena; and the advancement of knowledge and the pursuit of information are not in themselves sufficient justifications for overriding the values and ignoring the interests of those studied. They should be aware that for research participants becoming the subject of anthropological description and interpretations can be a welcome experience, but it can also be a disturbing one. In many of the social scientific enquiries that have caused controversy, concerns have resulted from participants' feelings of having suffered an intrusion into private and personal domains, or of having been wronged, for example, by acquiring self-knowledge which they did not seek or want. The guidelines generally apply in public spaces as well as in private spaces and anthropologists must take steps at the beginning of fieldwork to sensitise themselves to local norms that may consist of different ideas about the private and public from the anthropologist's own.

#### **5.1 Wellbeing of research participants and honouring trust:**

Anthropologists should endeavour to ensure the physical, social and psychological well-being of those with whom they conduct their study and to respect their rights, dignity, interests, sensitivities and privacy. It is also important to keep in mind the ethical responsibilities to non-human research subjects. In research conditions where it may not be possible to fully guarantee research participants' interests, anthropologists are well-advised to consider in advance whether they should pursue such research. When employment conditions hamper the anthropologist's decision-making abilities in this regard, please see point 7.4 below for recommendations.

### *5.2 Obligations to research participants*

Anthropologists must reflect on the likely impacts on the communities/cultures/societies they are studying. When there is conflict between the anthropologists' interests and those with whom they study, it is the participants' interests and rights that are of primary importance.

### *5.3 Anticipating harms*

Anthropologists should be sensitive to the possible consequences of their work and should endeavour to guard against predictably harmful effects. Consent from participants does not absolve anthropologists from their obligation to protect research participants and their environment. Even though research participants may be immediately protected by the device of anonymity, the researcher should anticipate the long-term effects on individuals or groups that may result from their research. In certain political contexts, some groups, for example, religious or ethnic minorities, may be particularly vulnerable and it may be necessary to withhold data from publication, archiving or even to refrain from working with them at all.

### *5.4 Avoiding undue intrusion*

When information is being collected from proxies, care should be taken not to infringe the private space of the person from whom information is sought or the relationship between that person and the proxy. If there are indications that the person concerned would object to certain information being disclosed, such information should not be sought by proxy.

### *5.5 Explaining technology and its uses*

When audio-visual media are to be used, be it merely for data-gathering or for broader representational purposes such as producing ethnographic films or photographic essays, the principal research participants should be made aware of the technical capacities of these media and should be free to reject their use.

### *5.6 Fair return for assistance*

There should be no economic exploitation of individual participants, translators, groups, non-human animals, cultural or biological materials; fair return should be made for their help and services.

### *5.7 Participants' intellectual property rights*

It should be recognised that research participants have contractual and/or legal interests and rights in data, recordings and publications, although rights will vary according to agreements and legal jurisdictions. It is the obligation of the anthropologist to inform participants such as interviewees of their rights under any copyright or data protection laws of the country where research takes place, and the anthropologist should indicate beforehand any uses to which the anthropological use of interview methods is likely to be put (e.g., research, educational use, publication, broadcasting etc).

### *5.8 Establishing rights to use published and online data*

Making a document available online does NOT automatically give a researcher carte blanche to use it as research data. Anthropologists engaged in digital ethnography or other forms of research that involve the use of online documents, video, images and/or audio-recordings already in the public domain and/or available through fora such as blogs, chatrooms, social media sites etc., should remain sensitive to the possible implications of re-using those electronic texts, images and sounds, not only in terms of ethical responsibilities to the people concerned but also in relation to the Intellectual Property Rights (e.g. copyright) held either by the people themselves or by those who created the images or recordings in the first place. It is important to note that the very notion of public domain is an evolving, shifting domain and hence so is digital ethnography and its ethical implications.

## **6. Relations and responsibilities - Sponsors, funders, and employers**

Anthropologists should make sponsors, funders, and employers aware of the obligations that they have not only to them, but also to research participants and to professional colleagues. Anthropologists should always clarify in advance the respective roles, rights and obligations of the sponsor, funder, employer and researcher and should be careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions which would be contrary to professional ethics or competing commitments. Anthropologists should be careful to clarify, preferably in advance of signing contracts or starting their research, matters relating to their professional domain and to their control over the research project and its products. They are entitled to full disclosure of the sources of funds, personnel and aims of the institution for the purpose(s) of the research project and the disposition of research results. Where conflicts seem likely, they should refer sponsors or other interested parties to the relevant portions of the ASA Guidelines. Any research, consultancy or other services to national/supra-national or foreign states or to non-state entities (such as transnational corporations, law enforcement agencies, NGOs or charities) that are seeking to adversely intervene in the lives of communities/cultures/societies should be avoided.

### *6.1 Declaring conflicts of interest*

Anthropologists should be particularly aware of likely constraints on research and publication and of the potentiality for conflict between the aims of the employer, funder or sponsor and the interests of the communities/cultures/societies studied. Where some, or all, of the research participants are also acting as sponsors and/or funders of the research, the potential for conflict between their different roles and interests should be made clear to them.

### *6.2 Avoidance of covert or coercive research*

Covert research for state or non-state organisations breaches relationships of trust and openness. Equally, overt research where participants are known to be subject to coercion is a breach of basic ethical standards.

### *6.3 Obligations to sponsors, funders and employers*

Anthropologists should recognise their general and specific obligations to sponsors, funders and employers, whether these are contractually defined or are only the subject of informal, and often unwritten, agreements. They should be honest about their qualifications and expertise and about the strengths and limitations of their methods and data. They should acknowledge the necessity for discretion with confidential information provided by sponsors and employers and should not conceal personal or other factors which might affect the satisfactory conduct or completion of the proposed research project or contract.



#### *6.4 Negotiating research space*

Sponsors, funders or employers should respect anthropologists' professional judgement and expertise regarding their research, regardless of whether these obligations are incorporated in formal contracts. Even when contractual obligations may necessitate the guarding of privileged information, the methods and procedures that have been utilised to produce the published data should be shared. Researchers should assert their ability to protect the rights and interests of research participants, their ability to make all ethical decisions in their research, and their own and other parties' rights in data collected, in publications, copyright and royalties.

### **7. Relations and responsibilities - Colleagues and the discipline**

Anthropologists derive their status and certain privileges of access to research participants through their personal standing and their professional citizenship. In acknowledging membership of a wider anthropological community, anthropologists owe various obligations to that community and can expect consideration from it. Consideration for and consultation with anthropologists who have already worked or are currently working in the proposed research setting is advisable and is also a professional courtesy. In particular, the vulnerability of established long-term research projects to new academic intrusion should be recognised and any issues addressed.

#### *7.1 Individual responsibility*

Anthropologists bear responsibility for the good reputation of the discipline and its practitioners. In considering the methods, procedures, content and reporting of their enquiries, their behaviour in the field and relations with research participants and field assistants, they should ensure that their activities will not jeopardize future research. Thus, anthropological researchers are subject to the general moral rules of scientific and scholarly conduct: they should not deceive or knowingly misrepresent (e.g. fabricate evidence, falsify, or plagiarise), or attempt to prevent reporting of misconduct, or obstruct the scientific/scholarly research of others.

#### *7.2 Conflicts of interest and consideration for colleagues*

There may be conflicts of interest (professional and political) between anthropologists, particularly between visiting and local researchers, and especially when cross-national research is involved. In cross-national research, consideration should be given to the interests of local scholars and researchers, to the problems that may result from matters such as the disparities in resources available to different researchers, and to problems of equity in collaboration. As far as is possible and practicable, visiting anthropologists should try and involve local anthropologists and scholars in their research activities but should be alert to the potential for harm that such collaboration might entail in some contexts.

#### *7.3 Sharing research materials*

Anthropologists should consider ways how research data and findings are shared with colleagues and with research participants. Research findings, publications and, where feasible, data should be made available in the country where the research took place. If necessary, reports or briefings should be translated into the national or local language. Researchers should be alert to the harm to research participants, partners and local colleagues that might arise from total or even partial disclosure of raw or processed data or from revelations of their involvement in the research project. Anthropologists should weigh up the intended and potential uses of their work and the impact of its distribution in determining whether limited availability of results is warranted and ethical and that they have appropriate permission and consent from participants.

#### *7.4 Collaborative and team research*

When anthropologists collaborate with researchers in other disciplines and with research and field assistants, clerical staff, students etc., they should make clear their own ethical and professional obligations and similarly take account of the ethical principles of their collaborators. Care should be taken to clarify roles, rights and obligations of team members in relation to matters such as the division of labour, responsibilities, access to and rights in data and fieldnotes, publication, co-authorship, professional liability, etc. Anthropologists in junior roles on multi-disciplinary research teams who find that the ASA Ethical Guidelines are compromised by hierarchical, potentially harming, decisions or practices, should seek advice from a mentor or supervisor, who may be outside the organisation.

#### *7.5 Responsibilities towards research students and field assistants*

Academic supervisors and project directors should ensure that students and assistants are aware of the ASA Ethical Guidelines and should discuss with them potential (as well as actual) problems which may arise during the stages/periods of fieldwork or writing-up.

#### *7.6 Authorship and acknowledgements*

The support and intellectual input of colleagues should be appropriately acknowledged. Researchers should publicly acknowledge student/researcher assistance in research and preparation of their research and give appropriate credit for co-authorship to students/researchers and encourage publication of worthy student/researcher papers; and compensate students/researchers justly for their participation in all professional activities.

### **8. Relations with own and host governments and wider society**

Anthropologists should be honest and candid in their relations with their own and host governments. Researchers should seek assurances that they will not be required to compromise their standards of ethical integrity. Research conducted outside one's own country raises special ethical and political issues relating to personal and national disparities in wealth, power, the legal status of the researcher, political interests and his or her national political systems and anthropologists should bear in mind the differences between the civil and legal, and often the financial position of national and foreign researchers and scholars. They should be aware that irresponsible actions by a researcher or research team may jeopardise access to a research setting or even to a whole country for other researchers, both anthropologists and non-anthropologists. Anthropologists also have responsibilities towards other members of the public and wider society, now and in the future. They depend upon the confidence of the public and, in their work, attempt to promote and preserve such confidence without exaggerating the accuracy or explanatory power of their findings.

#### *8.1 Openness in research*

Social inquiry is predicated on the belief that greater access to well-founded information will serve, rather than threaten, the interests of society. Anthropologists owe a responsibility to participants, publics, their colleagues around the world and to the discipline not to use their anthropological role as a cover for clandestine research or activities.

#### *8.2 Legal and administrative constraints*

Anthropologists should actively research any national laws or administrative regulations which may affect the conduct of their research, any matters pertaining to data dissemination and storage, publication and rights of research subjects, sponsors and employers, etc. They should also remember that, save in a very few exceptional circumstances, social research data are not

privileged under law and may be subject to legal subpoena and that laws vary by jurisdiction. Some which may have consequences for research and publication in the U.K. are, for example, the GDPR, Race Relations Act, Official Secrets Act, and the relevant laws concerning child protection, prevention of terrorism, defamation, confidence, privacy, copyright and contracts.

### *8.3 Widening the scope of social research*

Anthropologists should use the possibilities open to them to extend the scope of social inquiry and to communicate their findings for the benefit of the widest possible community. Anthropologists are most likely to avoid restrictions being placed on their work when they are able to stipulate in advance the issues over which they should maintain control; the greatest problems seem to emerge when such issues remain unresolved until the data are collected, or the findings emerge.

### *8.4 Considering conflicting interests*

Information may be misconstrued or misused but should still be collected and disseminated. All information is subject to misuse and no information is devoid of possible harm to one interest group or another. Individuals or groups may be harmed or may benefit from their participation in research. Researchers are often unable to prevent action based on their findings but should preempt likely misinterpretations and counter them when they occur.

### *8.5 Maintaining professional and scholarly integrity*

Research can never be entirely objective as the selection of topics may reflect certain cultural or personal values, the employment of the researcher, the source of funding and any of these factors may impose certain priorities, obligations and prohibitions. Yet anthropologists should strive for impartiality and fair representation and be open about known barriers to its and should not engage or collude in selecting methods designed to produce misleading results or in misrepresenting findings, either by commission or omission. When it is likely that research findings will inform public policy and opinion, anthropologists should be careful to state any significant limitations on their findings and interpretations.

## **9. Epilogue**

The reputation of anthropological research will inevitably depend less on what professional bodies assert about their ethical norms than on the conduct of individual researchers. We recognise that ethical views and conclusions may legitimately differ, even when there is agreement about the facts of the case. The researcher thereby needs to reflect on their own position in the research and their research practices at all stages. These guidelines are aimed at helping anthropologists to reach an equitable and satisfactory resolution of their (potential) dilemmas. This statement of ideals does not impose a rigid set of rules backed by institutional sanctions, given the variations in both individuals' moral precepts and the conditions under which they work. Guidelines cannot resolve difficulties in a vacuum nor allocate greater priority to one of the principles than another. Instead, they are aimed at educating anthropologists, sensitizing them to the potential sources of ethical conflict and dilemmas that may arise in research, scholarship and professional practice, and at being informative and descriptive rather than authoritarian or prescriptive. They aim to ensure that where a departure from the principles is contemplated or where the privileging of one group or interested party or parties is deemed situationally or legally necessary, the researcher's decisions should be based on foresight and informed deliberation.

Just as the current document has been immeasurably enriched by comments and contributions from ASA members, we very much hope that ASA membership will continue to call attention to

issues and resources relating to the ethical guidelines of anthropology for the purpose of debate and deliberation.

## **10. Acknowledgments**

The amendments to the ASA Ethics Guidelines were drafted by the ASA Ethics Guidelines Group (ASA EGG) from 2019-2020. The core working group members were volunteers who responded to a call sent out to the membership in 2018 and 2019 and were: Kirsten Bell; Garry Marvin; Jude Robinson (ASA Ethical Officer 2018-21); Heike Schaumberg; and David Zeitlyn. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Lucy Pickering, Sarah Bourke and members of the ASA Executive Committee.

To inform the work of the group, we conducted a survey of the ASA membership, also open to interested others, to learn more about their experiences of institutional ethics review and their views of the ASA guidelines. The [results of the survey](#) indicated that the guidelines are most useful in educating non-specialists about ethnographic research (such as ethics committees, funders, etc.) and for training purposes. However, respondents indicated a desire for further resources, case studies and workshops that would offer them opportunities to reflect more deeply on their own ethical practice. For this reason, we have focused on updating the guidelines to ensure they are clear and current, but new content comes primarily in the form of links to independent resource lists for key areas (e.g., consent, online research, etc.) that include overviews of the core issues, and links to relevant papers, case studies and guidelines.

These amendments build on changes made by the ASA Executive Committee during the period July 2010 – November 2011, which considered and revised The ASA Ethics Guidelines, 1999. The Committee also gratefully acknowledges the use of some language from the American Anthropological Association (2012) [Statement of Ethics](#). At the ASA AGM 2020, held online on the 26<sup>th</sup> August, it was agreed that the recent amendments would be incorporated into the ASA Ethics Guidelines 2020.

This version of the ASA Ethics Guidelines is a living document, and members are asked to bring to the attention of the ASA ethics officer ([ethics@asa.org](mailto:ethics@asa.org)) any amendments that they would like to make to the guidelines, including links to websites or additional resources. Suggested amendments will be added annually to the Guidelines as Addenda, on approval at the ASA AGM. With or without amendments, the ASA Ethics Guidelines will be submitted for approval at the ASA AGM as a standing item, and the date of the guidelines will be changed each year, to reflect the current status of the document. It is the responsibility of the ASA Ethical Officer to review the ASA Ethics Guidelines annually before presenting to the ASA AGM each year, and to recommend a further full review involving an Ethical Guidelines Group should the research landscape or membership require it.