Author's Commentary on "Ethical Considerations with Archaeology and Community Conflict"

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This case, like "The Case of the Over Eager Collaborator," deals particularly with those populations who are affected by, or affect, archaeological research (stakeholders). In the past, archaeology has focused primarily on the study of ancient cultures. Famous finds such as Schliemann at Troy and Carter's Tutankhamen made archaeology a world-famous discipline by the early 20th century, and archaeology has continued to be popular and important in the modern world. As archaeology progressed, so did the depth and variety of archaeological research and discussions of archaeological ethics. Presently, archaeologists work around the world at sites millions of years to tens of years old. There are also archaeologists today who are interested in studying the discipline and practice of archaeology in modern social, economic, political and other contexts.

As archaeologists began questioning the place of archaeology in modern contexts, archaeological ethics came to the forefront of research and writing. Books and articles written on ethics have included discussions of such issues as stakeholders, protection of the archaeological record from looting, public education and intellectual property (Lynott and Wylie 1995; Vitelli 1996; Zimmerman, Vitelli and Hollowell-Zimmer 2003). In 2004, the Society for American Archaeology initiated the archaeological "Ethics Bowl," for graduate students to debate case studies in front of an audience at the SAA annual meeting (SAA Web 2005). These articles, books, and events have placed archaeological ethics at the forefront of important issues in the discipline.

This case raises an archaeological ethics nightmare: a community split with heated debate over the value of an archaeological site. Though archaeologists, as stewards of the past and participants in creating it, see the value of archaeology and its broader discipline anthropology, it is often difficult to communicate that value to

others. In the booming modern context of American suburbia, how do archaeologists fight for preservation in the face of "progress"?

There are three important discussion topics related to ethics in this case: 1) The struggle to define "stakeholders" and their roles in the profession of archaeology, 2) the conflicting and ambiguous ethical standards in the profession of archaeology, and 3) ethical issues arising from team research in the social sciences. Although this case is fictional, discussions of these issues are important to the discipline, as such dialogue could influence the decisions made by future researchers and students, especially those in or near American communities.

One commentator on "The Case of the Over Eager Collaborator" (see section 6 in this volume) notes that archaeologists necessarily deal with a myriad of stakeholders on any given project. In this case, there are at least eight primary stakeholders who have interests related to the management of archaeological resources in Arrowhead. These stakeholders include the following: Avery, his research team, and other archaeologists in the discipline, community members who support mall construction, community members who are against mall construction, a corporate organization (Global Malls Inc.), members of a local Native American tribe, and people with various other opinions. On a broader scale, stakeholders might also include archaeologists employed by the state, funding agencies supporting Avery's research, other Native American groups, political officers, and many others. If ethical archaeologists should consider the contexts of their research, and respect the concerns of stakeholders, how are they to reconcile so many differing opinions? Is this even possible without forfeiting some professional interest in stewardship?

Recently, archaeologists have been praising community-based archaeological research and, especially, archaeological practice that involves local indigenous populations. In the SAA "Ethics Bowl," the three C's (Communicate, Cooperate, and Collaborate) have been an appropriate and well-received solution for most of the fictional case studies involving community dilemmas. However, few archaeologists have discussed the potential difficulties and conflicts in community-based research utilizing such methods as Participatory Action Research (PAR). For instance, no two communities or group of stakeholders are the same and, thus, no two community-based projects will present the same challenges. This case elucidates the complexities of working with or in different communities. It is wonderful when the public learns from archaeologists or participates in archaeological research. It is not

enough, however, to say archaeologists should simply work with local communities — social scientists should be aware of the consequences of such research. People (individually or in groups) are not predictable and no two community-based projects will be the same. Therefore, we must be flexible and open-minded and should prepare to deal with multiple stakeholders in our research in the most efficient, effective, and respectful ways possible.

The second major topic of the case reflects the seemingly opposing ethical codes in the profession of archaeology. Today, archaeologists work all over the world and in each nation they encounter unique situations involving stakeholders and the archaeological record. A plethora of international and national conventions, agreements, and laws help guide archaeologists in their research, though these are not usually binding, especially in regard to stakeholder responsibilities. For additional guidance and discussion, many archaeologists turn to the ethical codes of archaeological or anthropological organizations.

In this case, there are three such focal organizations: the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), the World Archaeological Congress (WAC), and the American Anthropological Association (AAA). As indicated by the case, some of the ethical recommendations made by these organizations seem to be contradictory (for the full text, see SAA 2005; WAC 2005; AAA 2005). One can question the utility of such codes, by-laws, or principles in a discipline if they are incongruous. Principally, if one of the goals of ethical codes is to teach future archaeologists responsible research practices, what are students to think of or learn from codes that provide contradictory advice?

Again, the goal is not to argue for the end of ethical codes in archaeology. The main point in this section is that in any real-life (or even fictional) research situation, the circumstances and stakeholders will differ. Because of this, no one or even three ethical codes will present definitive ethical research standards. In every case, archaeologists should debate stewardship, accountability to local populations, commercialization, etc. and come up with compromised solutions (or at least steps toward a common goal). There are no simple and straightforward answers to issues of ethics — instead, there are principles, responsibilities, debates, and compromises.

The final section of the case study calls into question the ethical responsibilities of lead researchers and team members in group research situations. During the GREE workshop, we discussed various ethical situations which could arise when multiple

researchers work together on the same project. These include questions about: ownership of data, right to publication, authority, mentor/mentee relationships, etc. This case asks how differing opinions within a research group should be handled, specifically within the context of community/research group disagreement.

The majority of archaeology done in the United States today is Cultural Resource Management (CRM) archaeology. These projects are run by public or private companies and, in short, CRM archaeologists attempt to identify archaeological resources which may be destroyed by new construction projects and mitigate the loss of information by performing different scales of excavation. CRM work is often quick work, but it still involves stakeholders. An additional group of stakeholders in CRM projects are the team-members, since CRM is almost never an individually accomplished project. Team-members, who may number between two and twenty, often work under the leadership of the Principal Investigator (PI). This arrangement may lead to some of the same research ethics questions listed above (i.e. right to publication, authoritative voice). Furthermore, the transient nature of CRM archaeology often results in workers who are disconnected to their research site, resulting in group research that is dominated by the research goals and analysis of a principal investigator. Ideally, all social science research should be poly-vocal and researchers should exchange ideas before, during, and after projects. Especially within the social sciences, the opinions of the public should also be considered. Again, ethical research in archaeology should include preparatory work and consideration of multiple viewpoints.

An increased awareness and popularity of public archaeology and archaeological ethics have brought archaeologists face-to-face with situations such as the one presented in this case study. Few archaeologists still believe that archaeological research exists in a political, economic, or social vacuum.   After all, social science is research that deals, primarily, with living people. It is time all social scientists consider the contexts in which they work and the consequences of their research. The work of groups such as the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics and the discussion of ethical research situations will help inform future social scientists of these issues.

References

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