**The University of Akron**

**Cummings Center for the History of Psychology**

**The Ludy T. Benjamin, Jr.**

**Distinguished Lecture in the History of Psychology**

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***Tales from the Field: Principled Perspectives for***

***Research with Indigenous Communities***

**Overview, References, and Selected Readings**

**THEMES**

*“Never look for a psychological explanation unless every effort to find a cultural one has been exhausted.”*

- Margaret Mead, 1959, p. 16.

*“The way to do fieldwork is never to come up for air until it is all over.”*

- Letter from New Guinea, quoted by Jane Howard, 1984

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*“Malinowski was most insistent that every culture be understood in its own terms, that every institution be seen as a product of the culture within which it developed. It follows from this that a cross-cultural comparison of institutions is essentially a false enterprise, for we are comparing incomparables.”*

- Walter Goldschmidt, 1966, p. 8.

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*“This was my first night in Lesu alone. As I sat on the veranda of my thatch-roofed, two-room house in the early evening I felt uncertain and scared not of anything, but just of being alone in a native village. I asked myself, ‘What on earth am I doing here, all alone and at the edge of the world?”*

- Hortense Powdermaker 1967, p. 51.



*“There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it’s going to be a butterfly.”*

- R. Buckminster Fuller, 1995-1983.

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*“What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity. By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favors death. The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life.”*

- Hoy 1982; Octavio Paz.

*“The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively—both against other such wholes and against social and natural background—is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures.”*

- Clifford Geertz, 1973, p. 34.



*“I have seen that in any great undertaking it is not enough for a person to simply depend upon themselves.”*

- Lone Man (*isna la wica*) late 19th century Teton elder

**Overview**

The objective of this presentation is to raise points to promote culturally sensitive decision making in research with ethnocultural populations. This will reflect the unique historical and socio-cultural realities of ethnic and racial groups and their communities. The presentation will emphasize four key aspects of culturally sensitive research: (1) applying a cultural perspective when evaluating research risks and benefits; (2) developing and implementing culturally respectful procedures; (3) constructing culturally appropriate data collection methods; and (4) engaging in meaningful consultation with communities and participants with a standard of “principled cultural sensitivity.”

There is a growing distrust that communities are expressing toward researchers, stemming from valid concerns about past research efforts. Many ethnocultural community leaders now demand greater involvement in and control over research. Researchers must be prepared to collaborate, share practical results, and accept conditions required for access to the community. Additionally, researchers should concentrate on the factors defining race, ethnicity, and culture, understanding of within-group differences, and skills in constructing culturally valid assessments.

While federal regulations and professional codes provide important guidance, they are incomplete for identifying and resolving the complex ethical challenges in research with ethnic groups. Investigators undertaking the critical task of generating information to inform psychological services, public opinion, and policies have a formidable responsibility. Their procedures must be scientifically sound, culturally valid, and morally just.

**Objectives**

* To foster ethical, principled, and responsible decision-making in community research involving ethnocultural populations, taking into account their unique historical and socio-cultural backgrounds.
* To emphasize the negative outcomes of irresponsible research practices and cultural insensitivity on both researchers and participants.
* To advocate for a culturally sensitive approach when assessing the risks and benefits of research.
* To encourage individuals to reflect on their own cultural beliefs and values in a respectful manner.
* To support community and participant involvement in research with a focus on cultural sensitivity.
* To provide information that prompts thoughtful discussions on how ethnocultural groups perceive research topics, appropriate intervention points, culturally accepted intervention methods, and considerations for the ethical implementation of interventions.

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