

show up in a community, or if the community might want to review your research plans before giving you permission to carry out your research there.

18.4.2 Getting started in the community

What happens on reaching the field? This is an exciting time, and often a very anxious time as well. Hopefully through the preparation of the ethics protocol for the university, and through talking with people and reading, you are not entering a community cold, with the community having no knowledge of your impending arrival and you having no knowledge of the community beyond the language(s) spoken there. You have support (at least on paper), and you know who to meet when you first get there. What kind of ethical issues must you deal with? I focus here on people who are beginning fieldwork in a particular location, and especially ↵ on the novice fieldworker, rather than those who have already been involved in fieldwork in a community.

There are many aspects of fieldwork which at first sight may seem to be practical problems but which nevertheless raise questions of ethics that require careful consideration, and I raise some here, in the form of questions. There are no single, and often no simple, answers to these questions. Not all will be applicable in all circumstances, but overall these are issues that you are likely to face.

There are questions about settling in to a community.

Where should I live? This might seem like an odd question to ask when talking about ethics, but it can be important, if you have a choice. Where you live can affect who you interact with on an informal basis, and can affect what people think of you and how they interpret your goals, making it harder or easier to carry out the work. You might live with a family, in a rented space, in a hotel. There are issues of safety to be taken into account—safety both for you and for community members. For instance, there might be risks to a young woman living alone rather than with a family. There might be political consequences of living with a particular family that could have a detrimental effect on the work. A gay man might be uncomfortable in some settings. Safety issues within a community might suggest that it is preferable to live in a larger community, travelling in to the community to work. Advice is helpful when it is possible to get it, as each of these choices can have consequences for the fieldworker, for relationships with the community, and for the work to be done.

Unless you live on your own and do all your own food preparation, there are other issues you might face. If you are a vegetarian in a community where moose meat is highly valued, you might want to think about whether it would be interpreted as disrespectful for you to refuse moose meat that you are offered. If food considered a delicacy seems disgusting to you, you might consider the consequences of turning it down. While seemingly small, such issues can loom large in how people think of you, and are willing to cooperate with you. Balancing your needs and community expectations can be a challenge, but most find that it is well worth the while for all involved to consider such seemingly small things.

There are questions that relate to an ethics protocol.

Are there any kinds of permissions needed? My ethics protocol was approved in my home university. Can I just get started right away? Often there are other kinds of permissions that are needed, and in some instances, the university-approved ethics protocol, although necessary, can be the least important of all. In some places it is necessary to get a licence from the government in order to do research. This can take some time, and needs to be done before fieldwork can begin. Some communities might have their own written or oral ethics protocol procedures, defined in their terms. Once you arrive in a community, it might be important to meet with a chief or a king or an elder or some other local authority to get support and approval from them for your research. There might be gifts that need to be ↵ given. Community protocols are often unwritten, but