

ETHICS IN DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING:
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

LEA CLAIRE HARTZELL

B.A., The University of California at Santa Cruz, 1999

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Anthropology and Sociology)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

March 2003

© Lea Claire Hartzell, 2003

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Anthropology and Sociology

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date April 25, 2003

ABSTRACT

Making a documentary film that features human beings as subjects requires extensive thought about the potential impact on the actual lives of people. Similarly, the pursuit of anthropological knowledge via social science research also affects individuals and communities. Along with this awesome power that documentary filmmaking and anthropological research have to change peoples' lives, comes a heavy responsibility to use this power in an ethical way.

By examining the cross-sections between documentary filmmaking and anthropological research, I have found several intersections of ethical considerations that seem pertinent to both fields. The main ethical considerations I have found to be common to both documentary filmmaking and anthropology can be classified into four major categories. They are (1) the intention of the filmmaker/researcher, (2) the filmmaker/researcher's relationship with her subjects, (3) the various responsibilities of the filmmaker/researcher, and (4) how the filmmaker/researcher presents herself, her work, and the subjects to an audience.

In the first part of this thesis, I provide a review of some of the recent literature from anthropology and visual communication to establish a theoretical background based in visual anthropology. In the second part, I apply the discussed theoretical concerns to practical examples of ethical questions that specific documentary filmmakers have faced. The particular instances that I draw upon come from a recent public forum and panel debate on the topic of "Ethics in Documentary Filmmaking" held in Vancouver B.C. on March 26, 2002, sponsored by the Canadian Independent Film Caucus (CIFC). The three filmmakers from the panel that I discuss are Nettie Wild, Mark Achbar, and David Paperny. In the name of reflexivity, I also include a short discussion of some ethical concerns relating to my own documentary videos.

I conclude this thesis with a summary discussion of ethics in documentary filmmaking. Perhaps as long as a filmmaker or researcher thinks about the ethics of her actions while she is carrying out her project, she is acting in an ethical way. Thoughtfulness and reflection bring about conscious actions, whereas the act of following strict guidelines often leads to robotic, mindless behaviour. Ultimately, it is the filmmaker who must consider each ethical issue individually and make decisions based on the specific circumstances of her project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Introduction	1
Four Main Ethical Considerations	4
What is Ethical Behavior?	7
Intention of the Filmmaker/Researcher	11
Filmmaker/Researcher's Relationship with Subjects	17
Responsibilities of the Filmmaker/Researcher	26
Filmmaker/Researcher Presentation to the Audience	33
Theory vs. Practice	37
Case 1: Nettie Wild's Intentions	39
Case 2: Mark Achbar's Relationships with Subjects	41
Case 3: David Paperny's Responsibilities	43
Case 4: Lea Hartzell's Presentation to the Audience	45
Conclusion	49
References	51

Introduction

Making a documentary film that features human beings as subjects requires extensive thought about the potential impact on the actual lives of people. Filmmaking holds great power to affect people, not only the viewer, but also the individuals and the communities whose images the film uses to make its point. Along with this awesome power that documentary film holds to change peoples' lives, comes a heavy responsibility to use these images in an ethical way.

Similarly, the pursuit of anthropological knowledge via social science research must also be thought about in terms of ethics. Although the anthropological study of individuals and cultures holds great power to inform and educate people, it also has the potential to be harmful if practiced in an unethical way. If an anthropologist's loyalties shift too far away from the subjects of her study, it is possible for her social science research to damage individuals and communities.

For example, the British colonial government hired anthropologists to document African communities. The purpose of the research was to help the colonial administrators learn how best to control the indigenous population.

Colonial anthropology rationalized systemic policies of colonial officials that had long lasting consequences. In the postcolonial era, new nations have faced various problems fostered by colonialism... Their political problems were in no small part engendered during the colonial era by officials who believed that their decisions were dictated by evolutionist social science [Kuklick 1991: 183].

This type of social science research is potentially detrimental to the people being studied and can be considered unethical.

Both documentary filmmaking and anthropological research rely on intimate contact with the individuals and communities that are under study. With this reliance on the subject of the film or research, also comes a responsibility to subjects to carry out the project in an ethical way. I believe that it is the responsibility of the filmmaker and the researcher to utilize the power of filmmaking and social research for the betterment of individuals and cultures rather than as a tool for domination over them.

However, this is not such a clearly defined task. Conducting social science research or creating a documentary film that strives to make the world a better place can also be problematic. Since it is often difficult to know what effect our actions will have on others, especially on individuals and cultures that we are unfamiliar with, we cannot always be confident that we are acting in an ethical way.

As an anthropology student, I am approaching the issue of ethics from an anthropological perspective. However, having also shot and edited several short documentary videos, I also see myself as a filmmaker. It is from these experiences in both roles that I began to think of the possibility of combining current anthropological research ethics with the practice of making documentary films. I am most interested in the cross-sections between documentary filmmaking and anthropological research and the potential intersections of ethical considerations that seem pertinent to both fields.

Throughout this thesis, I will use the term "filmmaker/researcher" to refer to both documentary filmmakers and social science researchers. I have chosen this term to highlight the similarities between the two roles in terms of the ethical considerations that I believe are relevant to both those fields. Viewing filmmakers and researchers as having similar ethical issues brings out connections between these two fields that I think can help

both sets of people perform their jobs in a more ethical way. Although it is recognized that there is no way to set ethical guidelines that can be applied in all documentary filmmaking and social science research situations, by investigating these issues in connection with one another, it is my hope to develop an approach to ethics that I can use to inform my own future work in the field of documentary and anthropological film.

Four Main Ethical Considerations

The main ethical considerations I have found to be common to both documentary filmmaking and anthropology can be classified into four major categories. They are (1) the intention of the filmmaker/researcher, (2) the filmmaker/researcher's relationship with her subjects, (3) the various responsibilities of the filmmaker/researcher, and (4) how the filmmaker/researcher presents herself, her work, and the subjects to an audience.

Do the means justify the ends? The intentions that a filmmaker has for making a particular film or the motivations a researcher has for getting involved in a particular project ultimately affect the final product, whether it is a documentary film or a scholarly article. But does the filmmaker/researcher need to have ethical motivations for being involved in a project in order for that project to be considered ethical? Along the same lines, if the end result of a project produces an outcome that is beneficial to the subjects of the study, does it matter if the filmmaker/researcher had ethical intentions?

The filmmaker/researcher's relationship with her subject is another area that often contains many ethical dilemmas. Obtaining informed consent from a subject for his or her involvement in either a research project or a film can be problematic. Since it is difficult even for the filmmaker/researcher to ultimately determine how the subject's involvement in a project will affect his or her life, getting permission to film or study an individual, let alone a group of people, brings up ethical issues. Even collaborative projects that allow the subjects more control of how their information and images are used can run into ethical problems. For example, in 1966, visual communications

scholars Sol Worth and John Adair taught filmmaking to a group of Navajo in Pine Springs, Arizona (Worth and Adair 1972). Although the subjects of the project had control over the films that were made, many critics of the project have argued that since the filmmaking was imposed on the community by outsiders, rather than emerging from within, the Navajo project was ethically flawed (Ruby 2000: 215)

When a filmmaker/researcher takes on a project, she must be aware of the many responsibilities she has to various groups and individuals. The filmmaker/researcher often faces loyalties to funders, the audience, the subjects of her study, and also to herself (Ruby 2001). Sometimes the responsibilities to these various groups of people may be in conflict with one another and therefore create an ethical dilemma. For example, the agenda of people funding a film may be in conflict with the filmmaker's motivations for making the film. When a documentary receives funding from corporations that may potentially lose profits due to the messages that the filmmaker is giving, a conflict of interest may arise. As Marya Mannes discusses in her article "The Hot Documentary", "Controversy may lead to enlightenment, but not to sales" (Mannes 1955). By understanding the many responsibilities that a filmmaker/researcher has to various groups and individuals related to the project, she can become better equipped to handle these responsibilities in an ethical way.

Finally, the way that the filmmaker/researcher presents her project to the intended audience raises some ethical issues as well. If the film or written text is presented as an objective account of unbiased observation, the filmmaker/researcher is assuming a more omniscient role than if she acknowledges her own subjective voice by including some reflexivity in her project. By exposing the created nature of a project, a

filmmaker/researcher is helping the audience to identify truth as constructed and reality as subjective (Hansen 1991,1995; Flaxman 2000).

Many issues relating to these four areas of potential ethical dilemmas have been discussed in documentary film, in visual communication and in recent anthropological literature. By providing a review of some of this recent literature in the following sections, I hope to establish a theoretical background based in visual anthropology for thinking about the ethical concerns facing documentary filmmakers.

What is Ethical Behavior?

The issue of ethics in ethnographic work refers to more than simply the ethical conduct of the researcher. Rather, it demands that ethnographers develop an understanding of the ethical context(s) in which they work, a reflexive approach to their own ethical beliefs, and a critical approach to the idea that one ethical code of conduct could be hierarchically superior to all others [Pink 2001: 3].

Before we can discuss the challenges a documentary filmmaker faces in regard to producing a film that can be considered ethical, we need to first establish what ethical behavior is. Ethics are difficult to discuss in anthropology, since cultural relativists have argued that morals and ethics are not absolute (Barnard and Spencer 2000).

According to this way of thinking about ethics, it would follow that there is not merely one ethical stance for a filmmaker to take. There can never simply be one code of ethics that filmmakers should follow in order for them to make an ethical documentary. How each filmmaker goes about ethically making a film in a particular context will be different according to the time and place in which the filmmaker is doing each project. As Asch writes, "Ethical truths are relative to a particular culture and a particular moment in history. As filmmakers we should be aware of and take seriously the ethical concerns of the time in which we live" (Asch 1992: 204).

According to visual anthropologist Jay Ruby, what each society considers "ethical behavior" is determined by other aspects of that society. He believes that it is impossible to separate a particular set of morals from the reasons that a culture believes in them. As he writes, "Systems of knowledge and epistemologies are attached to moral systems. As an anthropologist, I would argue that morals and ethics are only comprehensible in

relation to other facets of a culture. In other words, I am a moral relativist" (Ruby 2000: 141).

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) provides a set of ethical guidelines that it asks anthropologists to consider during their research. The general emphasis of the AAA Code of Ethics is a respect for all people involved in the project. When an anthropologist's pursuit of knowledge involves investigations into the lives of other human beings, it becomes the researcher's responsibility to create and nurture a respect for all people related to the project. "In both proposing and carrying out research, anthropological researchers must be open about the purpose(s), potential impacts, and source(s) of support for research projects with funders, colleagues, persons studied or providing information, and with relevant parties affected by the research" (AAA Code of Ethics, 1998).

However, the AAA acknowledges that the most important ethical obligation that anthropologists have during their research is to the people involved in their study. Anthropological researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work. These obligations can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge, and can lead to decisions not to undertake or to discontinue a research project when the primary obligation conflicts with other responsibilities, such as those owed to sponsors or clients. These ethical obligations include: (1) To avoid harm or wrong, understanding that the development of knowledge can lead to change which may be positive or negative for the people or animals worked with or studied; (2) To respect the well-being of humans and nonhuman primates; (3) To work for the long-term conservation of the archaeological, fossil, and historical records; (4) To consult actively with the affected individuals or group(s), with the goal of establishing a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved" [AAA Code of Ethics, 1998].

The National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (NAPA) also sets out ethical guidelines for its practitioners. They are designed to act as a guide for the ethical responsibilities that a professional practicing anthropologist is expected to uphold. However, the NAPA code of ethics also reveals that there is not any one set of ethical guidelines that can be applied in all situations.

No code or set of guidelines can anticipate unique circumstances or direct practitioner actions in specific situations. The individual practitioner must be willing to make carefully considered ethical choices and be prepared to make clear the assumptions, facts, and issues on which those choices are based" [NAPA Ethical Guidelines for Practitioners, 1988].

It is impossible for the filmmaker to ever rely on one set of ethical guidelines that she can follow in all situations, since each circumstance comes with its own ethical dilemmas specific to that particular instance. Filmmakers also must understand that it is not just their own ethical code that matters. Making a film also involves other people, who have their own ideas about what is considered ethical behavior. Filmmakers must be aware of the many ethical codes surrounding their work and develop a way of working on the project that takes into consideration the ethics of everyone involved. Many people and institutions are involved in the making of a film, each with his or her own set of moral codes. The filmmaker's job is to assess all the varied ethical codes involved in a project and attempt to act as ethically as possible for that particular situation. As one visual anthropologist writes, "Ethnographers should seek to identify where the ethics of the research fit in with these other ethical codes with which it intersects. Ultimately, ethics in ethnography is concerned with making decisions based on interpretations of the moralities and intentionalities of other people and the institutions they represent" (Pink 2001:39).

Although it is important for organizations such as the AAA and NAPA to establish codes of ethics, it is difficult for these types of guidelines to address all situations. There is a danger in setting strict rules regarding ethical behaviour, since each documentary film or research project brings up different ethical issues. That is precisely why filmmakers and researchers must take it upon themselves to constantly be conscious of the ethical implications of their own actions, instead of relying on association guidelines to dictate how they should behave.

Intention of the Filmmaker/Researcher

Is it ethical to lie to someone assumed to be evil in order to perform what you regard as a positive act? (Ruby 2000: 147)

There are many different motivations that a filmmaker may have for making a documentary film. Whether a film is made for personal, professional, or social reasons, it is important to consider the filmmaker's intentions. Although there may not be a "right" reason for making a film, by analyzing the intentions of the filmmaker and the ethical issues that arise as a result of those intentions, we can see how the motivations behind a project may have an effect on the audience and subjects of the film.

The process of making a documentary film requires purposeful, conscious acts. Just by picking up a camera and turning it on, a filmmaker is making decisions about the film. Therefore, it is necessary for the filmmaker to have a clear vision of what she wants to accomplish by making the film in the first place. This will help guide the many decisions she will make throughout the filming and editing process.

The circumstances surrounding the way in which the images in the film are captured by the filmmaker leave their mark on the final product. The biases, thoughts, and ultimately the worldview of the filmmaker are reflected in the film that is produced. The subject matter that is chosen as a topic, the circumstances under which the film is shot, and the particular way the various scenes are edited together all are driven by the intentions of the filmmaker. Even though each viewer of the film, regardless of viewing context, is free to interpret the message of the film in many different ways, there is always a motive or intention behind the making of the film. Although the intention of the

filmmaker is not necessarily the “correct” way to view the film, it can be seen as a starting point for examining why the film was made in the first place.

Some social and political documentary filmmakers begin their projects with clear intentions. They know what they want to say, how they are going to say it, and to whom they are going to say it. Most decisions about the film are made before filming even begins. So how could this agenda driven method of documentary filmmaking be considered unethical?

Jay Ruby asserts that makers of these politically motivated documentary films are misusing the medium. He believes that by approaching the content, subjects, and audience of the film with a clear agenda, these filmmakers are spoon-feeding their ideas to the viewer. Rather than attempting to present the viewer with visual evidence and allowing her to make her own conclusions, Ruby believes that these types of films act in a biased and manipulative way towards their audience. He writes, “I am skeptical of the motives and sophistication of many political image makers. Even though thousands of films and millions of photographs have been employed in political causes in the past fifty years, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that they are a significant means of influencing people....Few revolutions were won in a movie house, on a television screen, or on the six o'clock news” (Ruby 2000: 148).

In my opinion however, the medium of documentary film can be an effective tool for presenting social and political issues to a general audience. A documentary can show an audience people, places and ideas that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to see. Merely the educational merits of politically motivated documentary films, which often open people's eyes to new issues, can be enough to warrant their production. Films

with clear agendas can sometimes help expose societal ills and shed light on political issues that need to be examined.

For example, a film about a struggling housing project in a low income neighborhood that is motivated by the desire to make the public aware of a social problem in its community can be seen as a social or political documentary. The intentions of the filmmaker are clearly expressed to both the subjects of the film and the audience. The film's purpose is to present a problem in society as illustrated by the subjects of the film, to the viewers who hopefully will be motivated to help the situation. This type of film is a "call to action" that expects the audience to be moved by the subjects in the film in such a way that they feel obligated to do something about the presented problem.

So what is wrong with a filmic attempt at motivating people to make the world a better place? According to Ruby, it doesn't work. He feels that documentary film is not the appropriate medium for changing the world. As far as he is concerned, the money used to make a film about a housing project could be better spent by just giving it to the housing project itself. He believes that politically motivated documentary films are not effective because they don't work in changing people's opinions about issues. If documentary films don't work in changing people's minds and exposing them to new ideas, then why bother making them?

I believe, however, that without politically motivated documentary films, many people would be less informed about issues that they might care about. Even if they don't work in a monetarily measurable way, films that are driven by social consciousness do in fact educate and make visible aspects of society that might go unnoticed. Whether

or not the film is “preaching to the choir” or not, at least the subject is getting more exposure than if the film had never been made in the first place. For example, the film *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* (Wild 2002) documents the drug scene of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. This film, which played in theatres in Vancouver in October of 2002, has drawn attention to the city’s drug problem and has opened the issue up to discussions of possible solutions by city council members.

The larger ethical dilemma that Ruby raises about the intentions of politically motivated documentaries is the morality of using an individual’s life to back an agenda. Regardless of whether or not filmmakers have good intentions, they are ultimately using the subject of the film to represent abstract social issues.

People in these images (politically motivated/social reform documentary films) are no longer aesthetic objects, but rather symbols of some collective force. A poor person is often used to stand for poverty or an oppressed factory worker for the ills of capitalism. The question arises: Is it acceptable to use someone’s life to illustrate a thesis? Are the considerations different when you are seeking to aid someone you regard as a victim by using that person in your film as opposed to using a subject in order to expose him or her as a villain? [Ruby 2000: 147].

Ruby’s point is well taken. However, his comments make documentary filmmaking seem futile. If it is abusing the medium to make a film that uses a subject to get a socially motivated point across, and it is unethical to solicit the cooperation of people that a filmmaker intends to show in a bad light, then is the only solution for the filmmaker to be restricted to making films about themselves? I think not.

There are many different motivations that cause a filmmaker to get involved in a particular film. Rather than worry about the ethical dilemma of using another person’s life to make a point, I think that it is more important for filmmakers to make clear their intentions for their projects from the beginning. If filmmakers have a clear idea of what

they want to say and how they are going to say it, at least they are thinking about their projects in a clear, conscious way.

However, sometimes the effects of a film reach beyond what the filmmaker had originally intended. Neither the filmmaker nor the subject can completely control how a film is interpreted by the viewer, since everybody sees and understands images differently according to his or her own *way of seeing*. "Although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends upon our own way of seeing" (Berger 1972: 10). Since each viewer interprets an image differently based on his or her own experiences, it becomes impossible for the image-maker to dictate how the images she creates will be viewed. Therefore, even if a filmmaker has the best intentions, it is still possible for a documentary film to have negative effects on the subject (Ruby 2000: 206).

Miscommunications between the filmmaker and the subject regarding the intentions behind the project have sometimes interfered with the making of documentary films. Without clear communication about what is motivating the production of the film, the subjects and the filmmaker have different understandings about the intentions behind the production of the documentary.

There is no way for a filmmaker to anticipate the exact ways in which a film will be interpreted by a particular audience. Therefore, it is difficult for the filmmaker to anticipate the effect that involvement in the project will have on the subject. As Calvin Pryluck explains, "With the best intentions in the world, filmmakers can only guess how the scenes they use will affect the lives of the people they have photographed; even a

seemingly innocuous image may have meaning for the people involved that is obscure to the filmmaker” (Pryluck 1976: 22)

The most ethical way for the filmmaker to battle this dilemma would be to think clearly about her intentions before setting out to make a film. Filmmakers should ask themselves questions such as “Why does this film need to be made?” and “What is this film trying to convey to people?” Once filmmakers have a clear understanding of why they are making the film, they will be better prepared to explain their intentions to the subject.

Filmmaker/Researcher's Relationship with Subjects

From indigenous perspectives ethical codes of conduct serve partly the same purpose as the protocols which govern our relationships with each other and with the environment. The term 'respect' is consistently used by indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect, the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct [Tuhiwai-Smith 2001:120].

The relationship between filmmaker/researchers and the subjects of their films is the most crucial dynamic to consider when thinking about ethics. The filmmaker, being in the traditionally more powerful role, must be aware of the effects that pointing a camera at someone has on that person. In order to make a documentary film in an ethical way, the filmmaker must cultivate a relationship with the subject that is based on mutual trust and respect.

Respecting the individuals and the communities that a filmmaker is working with is a basic ethical responsibility. Talking about concepts such as "respect" and "trust" can sometimes get a little vague. It is one thing to mention respecting the film's subjects in a general way, but an ethical documentary filmmaker must go beyond these abstractions.

The development of a written contract that outlines the specifics of the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject can be seen as a gesture of respect. This document, which often takes the shape of a signed informed consent form, represents the trust that the subject places in the filmmaker and the respect for the subject that the filmmaker offers in response. It is a contract between the filmmaker and the subject that makes their relationship publicly official and legally binding.

However, obtaining a signed informed consent form presents the filmmaker with another set of ethical dilemmas. For example, in cultures where verbal contracts are standard procedure, asking for an individual to sign a piece of paper can be seen as an insult to the relationship and may cause suspicion in the community. It can also be a problem getting signed consent forms from individuals who may be illiterate or whose language skills do not allow them to fully comprehend the document they are signing.

Getting informed consent from a subject can also be a difficult matter in terms of semantics. Informed consent implies that a subject is fully aware of what she is getting herself into by participating in the project or having her image recorded. However, since it is impossible for anyone, including the filmmaker, to predict the consequences of a particular subject's involvement, obtaining truly informed consent is an extremely difficult task.

So what is a filmmaker to do? It is important for both the filmmaker and the subject to have a clear understanding of their relationship. Trust and respect should be present in this relationship, however, the dilemma of informed consent forms still remains. Perhaps the most ethical way to deal with this issue would be for the filmmaker to make the decision about whether or not informed consent forms are appropriate based on each specific situation or context. In order for this to happen, the filmmaker must become aware of the cultural details within the communities she is working.

The ethical guidelines for anthropologists working in the field set out by the American Anthropological Association encourage researchers to protect the subjects that they work with. It is important then that filmmaker/researchers make themselves aware of the ethical practices of the community in which they are working in order to have a

better relationship with the subjects of their films. Some communities, often those that have had a history with anthropologists and filmmakers, have developed their own guidelines for the types of relationships they want with researchers. Social scientist Linda Tuhiwai-Smith discusses the ways in which the Maori have developed their own code of ethics that is to be followed during research and filmmaking that is done in their communities. Some of the sayings that make up this informal Maori code for researchers include *Kia tupato* (*Be cautious*), *Titiro, whakarongo... korero* (*Look, listen... speak*) and *Aroha ki te tangata* (*a respect for people*). Tuhiwai-Smith goes on to explain the underlying theme of the Maori code: respect.

The term 'respect' is consistently used by indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct [Tuhiwai-Smith 2001: 120].

Although respect can be seen as the fundamental basis for ethical interactions between a filmmaker/researcher and her subject, it is necessary to go beyond this general recommendation and discuss several specific issues pertaining to the researcher/subject relationship. Two of the many details that a filmmaker must think about and discuss with her subjects before she begins filming include the issues of individual anonymity and subject compensation.

Exposing a subject's face and voice in a documentary film publicizes that individual. In some cases, this may result in harmful consequences for the subject, their family, community, or even the filmmaker. During the development of the relationship

between filmmaker and subject, issues surrounding the consequences of revealing individual identities should be discussed.

This can be related to filmmaker intention as well. If the intended purpose of including a subject on screen is to use her image to portray a negative aspect about her or the society she belongs to, then the filmmaker can be seen as acting unethically. According to the AAA Code of Ethics, "Anthropological researchers must do everything in their power to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities" (AAA Code of Ethics, 1998). If the filmmaker/researcher sets out to violate the dignity of the subjects she is filming, she is in direct violation of the AAA Code of ethics.

For example, ethnographic filmmaker Dennis O'Rourke's 1987 film *Cannibal Tours* (O'Rourke 1987), follows a group of European tourists on a boat cruise up the Sepik River as they explore Papua New Guinea. There is no denying the absurdity of the tourists as they reveal, on camera, their views of the indigenous population as "primitive" and "stone-aged" peoples. Several scenes show the tourists disrespecting sacred spaces and haggling over pennies with local artisans. However, O'Rourke's filmmaking techniques can be seen as ethically controversial. By intentionally portraying some subjects of his film in a negative light, O'Rourke disrespects the filmmaker/subject relationship. Rather than protecting the dignity of his subjects, as recommended by the AAA Code of Ethics, O'Rourke gains the trust of the tourists and invites them to open themselves to the camera while at the same time plotting to reveal their negative qualities on film.

Another topic that affects the filmmaker's relationship with the subject is the issue of compensation. Filmmakers are traditionally the people who benefit most from their relationships with the subject, whether personally or professionally. In contrast, the idea of monetarily compensating subjects for their cooperation in a documentary film or social science research is a controversial one. If documentary filmmakers get into the practice of paying their subjects for interviews, the validity and candidness of the film may be called into question. However, expecting subjects to freely give up their time and energy is expecting a lot of them. Subjects' involvement in a film must benefit them in some way in order for the film to be made in an ethical way.

There have been many proposed ideas in social science literature regarding the most respectful ways for subjects to be compensated for their efforts (Banks 2001, Ruby 2000, Pink 2001). Since paying subjects is generally regarded as a problematic response to this issue, each researcher must come up with a culturally appropriate way of compensating the individuals and the community with which they work. Many filmmakers/researchers return to the subjects after the documentary is complete to give a copy of the final project to the community or give copies of the film to those whose images it features in an effort to "give back" to the subject. However, some say that merely returning once the project has been completed and giving back copies of the research materials is too little, too late. In response, many filmmaker/researchers have decided to involve the subjects in the project from the very beginning, resulting in various degrees of collaboration.

Ideas of collaboration with subjects were present even in the early days of documentary film. Robert Flaherty's 1922 classic *Nanook of the North*, which chronicles

the daily life and culture of an Inuit family, is often considered the beginning of documentary narrative film. Flaherty's approach to making this film involved aspects of collaboration in that he "actively involved his subjects in the filming, telling them what he wanted them to do, responding to their suggestions, and directing their performance for the camera" (Rothman 1997: 1).

This early form of collaboration allowed for the subjects of the film, Nanook and his family, to give their input on how they wished to be portrayed, rather than simply being observed by the camera. In this way, Sarris says Flaherty "was not spying on Nanook or attempting to capture Nanook's life in the raw. He was collaborating with Nanook on a representation rather than a simulation of existence" (Sarris 1963: 42). However, because of the fact that Nanook and the other subjects were being paid for their participation in the film, this example of collaboration can be seen as tainted by the power relationship brought on by monetary compensation.

Since Flaherty's days, ideas of collaboration have come a long way. Understanding the implied power relationship that comes with filmmaking and research, many documentary filmmakers and researchers have tried to break down these roles by making documentary films *with* the subjects rather than *about* them (Ruby 2000: 195). Ruby discusses several examples of collaborative filmmaking, including the work of Jean Rouch, Barbara Myerhoff and Lynne Littman.

According to Ruby, filmmaker Jean Rouch "pioneered a reflexive style in *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), in which one sees subjects actively participating in the production" (Ruby 2000: 212). By including footage of the subjects of the film taking

part in the production of their own images, Rouch shows the viewer that the people in the film also participated in the making of the film. Although the viewers may not know the extent of this collaboration between Rouch and his subjects, even the acknowledgement of the camera's presence that is shown by the subjects reflects Rouch's pursuit of presenting a shared representation of his subjects.

This reflexive style varies from some of Rouch's contemporaries including Frederick Wiseman and Robert Drew. Observational style documentaries such as *Titicut Follies* (Wiseman 1969) and *Primary* (Drew 1960) adopted a "fly-on-the-wall" approach to filmmaking where interaction with the individuals being filmed was avoided. With the control of the camera in the hands of the filmmaker, observational documentaries gave little opportunity for the subjects of those films to participate in the creation of their own representation.

Another example of collaborative filmmaking discussed by Ruby includes the work of anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff and filmmaker Lynne Littman. Myerhoff's ethnographic work with elderly Jewish people in Venice, California (Myerhoff 1980), which is presented in the documentary film *Number Our Days* (Littman 1983). Myerhoff and Littman's project attempted to transform the collaboration between researcher, filmmaker and subject into a *third-voice* ethnography. As Ruby explains, "Myerhoff proposed that the researcher-filmmaker seek to locate a *third voice*- an amalgam of the maker's voice and the subject's voice, blended in such a manner as to make it impossible

to discern which voice dominates the work- in other words, films in which outsider and insider visions coalesce into new perspective" (Ruby: 2000: 212). Although seen as a form of collaboration, the control of the *third-voice* ultimately still lies in the hands of the filmmaker/researcher, since they remain the ones who are responsible for the presentation of the knowledge gathered and the ones trained in research and filmmaking technologies.

As filmmaking knowledge and technology expands across the globe, subject involvement in documentary films can become more complex, which can in turn lead to a higher level of collaboration. The work of Eric Michaels and Faye Ginsburg with Australian Aboriginals can be seen as examples of speaking *with* or *alongside* the subject (Ruby 2000). Both Michaels and Ginsburg have worked on collaborative projects in Australia where they have facilitated the production of media by and for indigenous communities. Following Sol Worth and John Adair's "Navajo Project" (Worth and Adair, 1972), this level of collaboration demonstrated by Michaels and Ginsburg can be seen as an attempt at producing visual representations *of* indigenous people, *by* them. "New media enable a re-visioning of social relations with the encompassing society which more traditional indigenous forms cannot so easily accommodate. In this way, indigenous media have been used as vehicles for reproducing and transforming cultural identity for indigenous people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption (Carelli 1988; Michaels 1987; Turner 1992)" (Ginsburg 1995: 123).

Although Ruby believes that a "truly collaborative" documentary film is practically impossible (Ruby 2000: 208), it is my belief that involving the subjects in the filmmaking process at any stage can be a step in the right direction. It is true that the

term *collaboration* is sometimes used loosely when referring to subject involvement in films and research projects, but the more that filmmakers/researchers begin to think about sharing control with the subjects of their films, the more ethical the filmmaking process becomes. By allowing the subject their own agency to control the ways in which they represent themselves on film, the filmmaker/researcher supports a respectful relationship with the subject. However, an ethical relationship with the subject is only one of the many responsibilities that a filmmaker/researcher faces.

Responsibilities of the Filmmaker/Researcher

With great power, comes great responsibility! (Rami, 2002)

Along with making a documentary film or conducting anthropological fieldwork come many responsibilities. In order to carry out a project in an ethical way, it is necessary for the filmmaker/researcher to consider the needs of all the various people involved. By taking a look at who she is responsible to and what these responsibilities consist of, a filmmaker/researcher can better equip herself to handle making a documentary film in an ethical way.

Jay Ruby has outlined four major moral concerns that address the various people that a filmmaker has loyalties to. The first is a loyalty to self. In this way the filmmaker must be responsible to her own vision of what she wants the project to be. She must also be true to her own personal moral code and act accordingly with all people involved.

The second moral responsibility that Ruby discusses is a loyalty to the audience. During the making of a documentary film, it is important to remember that people will be watching it some day. Although you cannot anticipate how each viewer will perceive the film, by keeping potential audience reactions in mind during production, a filmmaker may be better able to effectively communicate the intended message of the film to those that will eventually see it.

Ruby also believes that filmmakers should have a loyalty to the funders of the film. The filmmaker has a responsibility to the people or institutions that gave money to make the film. Although the level of loyalty may not necessarily mean that the filmmaker needs to slant the message of the film in order to please the funders, Ruby believes, nevertheless, that a filmmaker has some sort of responsibility to the funders of

the film. "Funders and institutions that grant permissions to do research often require the image maker to sign a legally binding document as to the parameters of the work. Although conflicts do arise, they are most often settled in the courts, where ethical considerations are secondary to legal ones" (Ruby 2000:141).

The fourth of Ruby's moral considerations is a loyalty to the subject. Filmmakers have a foremost responsibility to assure that the subjects of their films are treated and portrayed in an ethically sound way. Subjects are perhaps the most vulnerable of all the people that the filmmaker has a responsibility to, since it is the subject's image that is taken by the filmmaker, viewed by the audience, and paid for by the funders. This vulnerability of the subject requires the filmmaker to take extra responsibility in order to assure ethical treatment of the subject.

The American Anthropological Association's ethical guidelines also parallel Ruby's belief that the filmmaker/researcher's most important ethical responsibility is to the subject. "Anthropological researchers have primary obligations to the people, species, and materials they study and to the people with whom they work. These obligations can supercede the goal of seeking new knowledge, and can lead to decisions not to undertake or to discontinue a research project when the primary obligation conflicts with other responsibilities, such as those owed to sponsors or clients" (AAA Code of Ethics 1998). According to the AAA, filmmaker/researchers' ethical responsibilities to their subjects so outweighs other responsibilities that filmmaker/researchers are expected to abandon a project if their responsibilities to other people or institutions would compromise the ethical treatment of the subjects.

The AAA Code of Ethics also outlines other responsibilities for ethnographic researchers. These recommendations can very easily be taken on by documentary filmmakers as ethical concerns to consider. These include responsibilities to the public, responsibilities to sponsors, responsibilities to government, and responsibilities to scholarship and science.

Similar to Ruby's discussion of a filmmaker's responsibilities to the audience, the AAA discussion of how an anthropologist is responsible to the public presents difficulties since it requires filmmaker/researchers to have a loyalty to people that they may never even see. The AAA defines a filmmaker/researcher's public as "all presumed consumers of their professional efforts" (AAA Code of Ethics 1998). It states that filmmaker/researchers have a loyalty to the public that requires them to be truthful in presenting their research. In line with Ruby, the AAA asserts that filmmaker/researchers have a commitment not to deceive their intended audience. This loyalty to the public not only includes the information that is presented but also the social and political implications that the film/research may have.

The difficulty of this responsibility comes mainly from the fact that each viewer comes to the film with a different background of knowledge, and therefore will ultimately view the film in a different way. Since each audience views the film differently, this presents a problem for the filmmaker, who is supposed to present the film in a way that the public can understand. This would require the filmmaker/researcher to make many assumptions regarding the public's current knowledge of the issue, its ability to comprehend the information that is being presented, and also any biases that the audience may have which would negatively effect its views about the subjects. In reference to the

filmmaker/researchers' dissemination of information to the public, the AAA states, "They must do everything in their power to insure that such information is well understood, properly contextualized, and responsibly utilized" (AAA Code of Ethics 1998).

Although it is impossible to completely predict the public's opinions, nevertheless it is necessary for filmmaker/researchers to think about the ways in which they are presenting their information, ideas and opinions in an attempt to clearly portray their subjects and themselves.

The AAA's discussion of anthropologists' responsibilities to their sponsors parallels Ruby's statements about filmmakers' moral responsibilities to their funders. "In relations with sponsors of research, anthropologists should be honest about their qualifications capabilities and aims" (AAA Code of Ethics 1998). Like Ruby, the AAA stresses honesty when dealing with the people and institutions that are providing monetary support of the project. It is necessary for researchers to openly disclose their goals for the project and to reveal their intentions from the beginning. The AAA and Ruby also expect filmmaker/researchers to find out the goals and intentions of the funders themselves in order to assure that there are no conflicting ethical concerns.

Anthropologists should be especially careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions contrary to their professional ethics or competing commitments. This requires that they require of sponsors full disclosure of the sources of funds, personnel, aims of the institution and the research project, and disposition of research results. Anthropologists must retain the right to make all ethical decisions in their research. [AAA Code of Ethics 1988].

Although the AAA and Ruby express similar views as far as filmmaker/researcher responsibilities to the audience and funders of a project, the AAA outlines more ethical responsibilities that it believes should be considered than does Ruby. The AAA Code of

Ethics discusses the researcher's responsibility to government, not only to their own, but also to the host government in the country in which the research is being conducted. Similar to the ways in which it suggests researchers deal with funders, the AAA encourages anthropologists to be honest with governments about their research. It also suggests that they "demand assurance that they will not be required to compromise their professional responsibilities and ethics as a condition of their permission to pursue research" (AAA Code of Ethics 1998).

This recommendation that the AAA makes for anthropologists to "demand assurance" from a host government that they will not be asked to compromise their ethics runs against cultural relativism and some of the recommendations that are made by social scientist Linda Tuhiwai-Smith. Tuhiwai-Smith emphasizes respect for the ethics of the culture in which the anthropologist is conducting research and encourages filmmakers/researchers to follow the rules and ethical guidelines that are laid out by the government or local community. For example, culturally specific ethical guidelines like the ones laid out by Maori Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (Te Awekotuku, 1991) Tuhiwai-Smith explains, "are not prescribed in codes of conduct for researchers, but tend to be prescribed for Maori researchers in cultural terms" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2001: 119).

Therefore, an individual filmmaker/researcher can sometimes be in the position of having to choose which set of guidelines she feels she must follow, since there may be cases where the professional guidelines, the governmental guidelines, and the guidelines of the community do not all coincide with each other.

Finally, the AAA also outlines anthropologists' responsibilities to scholarship and science. Before research even begins, the AAA recommends that anthropologists

acknowledge the potential ethical dilemmas of their projects. The researcher has a responsibility to scientific inquiry to address the ethical issues that can, and often do, arise during a research project. The AAA suggests that every research proposal should have a section that addresses the potential ethical issues that are involved in the project. Above all else, honesty is stressed in these AAA recommendations. A filmmaker/researcher should never deceive anyone in the name of science since the pursuit of knowledge and understanding should never involve any form of deception. "Anthropological researchers are subject to the general moral rules of scientific and scholarly conduct: they should not deceive or knowingly misrepresent (i.e. fabricate evidence, falsify, plagiarize), or attempt to prevent reporting or misconduct, or obstruct the scientific/scholarly research of others" (AAA Code of Ethics 1998).

This responsibility to scholarship also implies a responsibility to future researchers. The AAA suggests that researchers should conduct their fieldwork in a way that will allow future researchers to work in the same community. This means that filmmaker/researchers should make sure that they maintain respectful, professional relationships with the subjects and the community in which they are working in order to keep the possibilities of future research open.

This responsibility to future scholarship also requires filmmaker/researchers to archive their research and to make their work public. By allowing other people access to the research, a filmmaker/researcher helps to promote the further pursuit of knowledge. The AAA also recommends that fieldwork data should be preserved for posterity's sake. Ethnographic filmmaker Timothy Asch also suggests that documentary filmmakers should archive their data. Not only should they preserve their final film, but Asch also

recommends that filmmakers should file a copy of their raw footage at the National Film Archive in Washington D.C. for reference by future filmmakers/researchers (AAA Code of Ethics 1998). This recommendation may become increasingly controversial as intellectual property rights become more widely discussed. Among indigenous communities in particular, the issue of who controls the rights to the raw footage or data collected becomes yet another ethical issue to consider.

Asch also believes that filmmakers/researchers have the responsibility to get the findings of their research out into the public eye. If filmmaker/researchers collect research or footage under the pretense of distributing it in a certain way, whether it is a scholarly article or documentary film, they must not keep the information to themselves. They have a responsibility to their subjects, their audience, their funders, and to the pursuit of knowledge to make an attempt at distributing the film or publishing the article that is based on the footage or research collected.

Ultimately, a filmmaker/researcher has many responsibilities to many different people and institutions. It is only by recognizing what all these responsibilities entail that filmmaker/researchers can be equipped to fulfil their responsibilities. Although it may not be possible to uphold all of the responsibilities that have been laid out, it is important for a filmmaker to remember a quote from the movie *Spiderman*, "With great power, comes great responsibility!" (Rami, 2002).

Filmmaker/Researcher Presentation to the Audience

The maker of images has the moral obligation to reveal the covert - never to appear to produce an objective mirror by which the world can see its "true image". For in doing so, the status quo is strengthened, the repressive forces of this world are supported, and the very people about whom the image-makers claim to be concerned are alienated. So long as the dominant culture's images of the world continue to be sold to others as the image of the world, image-makers are being unethical
[Ruby 2000: 140].

The ways in which an anthropologist presents her fieldwork, or a documentary filmmaker presents her film can raise several ethical questions. The intention of the filmmaker, her relationship with the subjects, and her responsibilities to the many people involved in the project, are all evident in how the final project is put together and presented to the audience. Whether a film is presented as an objective record of pure, unbiased observation, or reveals its subjective nature using a reflexive voice, the way in which the end result of the research is presented to its intended audience reveals yet another ethical issue to consider.

The very act of observation holds great power. In Marcus Banks' discussion of visual ethics, he includes some of Foucault's ideas about observation and the panopticon. Foucault believes that, "The instrument of surveillance and social control grants power to those observing, subordination to those observed" (cited in Banks 2001: 128). Applying these ideas to modern day use of cameras in social science research, Banks agrees with Foucault. He believes that the ethical dilemma that presents itself with the act of observation applies to all research, however it is particularly relevant when a project involves capturing and utilizing another person's image. As Banks puts it, "What right do we have to film, photograph or video tape those we work with?" (Banks 2001:129).

However, Banks goes on to state that this dilemma is not so much a question of whether or not a filmmaker/researcher theoretically has the right to use another person's image in her research. According to Banks, it is the filmmaker/researcher's ability to compromise according to the context of the situation that is important. Banks feels that this ability to find contextual compromises to problems comes from self-reflection and awareness. He believes that this self-reflection is necessary in order to produce a documentary film that portrays its own subjectivity.

There are several ways in which a documentary film can sometimes omit subjectivity. Each decision that a filmmaker makes, from the way in which the footage was shot to the style in which the film was edited, influence the presentation of the final project to the audience. Whether they intend to or not, many filmmaker/researchers end up presenting documentary films in an "objective" way.

Documentary films, because of their classification as "non-fiction" films, are often associated with truth and reality. The audience, in some ways, expects a documentary film to tell the truth. However, since a documentary film is ultimately the subjective construction of the filmmaker, the way in which a documentary film presents itself to the audience raises an ethical question. "Given a common belief in the 'truthfulness' of the image, should the documentary artist remind the audience of the interpretive and constructed nature of the documentary form--that is, demystify the construction and become reflexive?" (Ruby 2000: 144).

The very nature of the editing process is a manipulation of reality. Putting events next to each other that never actually occurred chronologically in time automatically creates a dilemma. Therefore, the linear nature of film prevents it from objectively

portraying reality. Even a non-fiction documentary film can only ever be a subjective expression of the filmmaker's opinions and worldview.

There are certain ways in which a documentary film can acknowledge this subjectivity. For example, the use of narration in a film often portrays an objective, god-like perspective that implies "truth". By omitting this faceless character from the film and using the voice of the subject to tell a story or explain an idea, the audience may perhaps be less likely to assume that what they are seeing on screen is the objective truth. Also, including the filmmaker within the film allows the audience to actually see the person behind the camera. By exposing themselves on screen, the filmmakers also expose the constructed nature of the film, giving the audience a truer picture. In doing so, the filmmaking process is demystified and the constructed nature of the documentary is revealed.

However, since images are polysemous it is impossible to predict how each viewer will interpret a film. As Ruby explains, images have more than one socially generated meaning depending on the context in which they are viewed and on the individual who is viewing them. The interpretation of images depends on the label that is attached to the film (i.e. title), the context in which it appears (i.e. television, film festival, etc.) and what the audience expects from the person who created the film (i.e. anthropologist, student, artist, journalist, etc.) (Ruby 2000:141). Expectations that the members of the audience have based on all these factors will affect their interpretation of the film itself. Although filmmakers cannot be expected to predict all the ways in which each viewer might interpret their films, it is important that they keep their intended

audience in mind in order to avoid ethical dilemmas that might be caused by the misinterpretation of the images used in the film.

Many modern day anthropologists share some of these same sentiments regarding the ways in which filmmaker/researchers should present their work to the audience. Steering away from the notions of neutrality that positivism tends to promote, many anthropologists have swapped their identities as objective outsiders for those of the subjective researcher. For example, social scientist Linda Tuhiwai-Smith has walked the line between her roles as insider and outsider. Studying Maori mothers and being a Maori mother herself presents several ethical dilemmas for her to deal with. Acknowledging her role as an outside researcher, Tuhiwai-Smith also brings a subjectivity to her research that comes as a result of her insider status. She writes, "The critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity. At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality and richness of their data and analysis" (Tuhiwai-Smith 2001: 137).

Overall, in both anthropological research and documentary filmmaking, the idea of reflexivity is an important part of doing research or making a film ethically. By exposing the constructed nature of both films and written text, the filmmaker/researcher allows members of the audience to be active agents that are capable of their own interpretations, rather than merely presenting issues as objective truth that is not to be questioned. Filmmaker/researchers must acknowledge their own subjectivity and present this to the audience.

Theory vs. Practice

Because ethics are so embedded in the specific research contexts in which ethnographers work, like decisions about which visual research methods to employ in a project, ethical decisions cannot be concluded until the researcher is actually in the field [Pink 2001: 37].

In the previous sections, I have focused mainly on theoretical concerns that face anthropologists and documentary filmmakers in terms of ethics. It is important to review the literature in both the social sciences and visual communication in order to have a clear understanding of the ethical dilemmas that have been discussed in both fields. The various theories discussed in the literature lay the groundwork for filmmaker/researchers to explore their own thoughts about solutions to ethical dilemmas. By increasing their knowledge of the theoretical discussions surrounding filmmaking and research ethics, filmmaker/researchers can become more equipped to deal with ethical dilemmas in the field.

I would now like to discuss the practical application of these theoretical ideas to ethical research and filmmaking. By taking a look at some specific instances that have presented individual filmmakers with particular ethical questions, we can better understand how some of the theoretical issues discussed in the earlier sections of this thesis apply to the actual practice of making a documentary film. Since ethical decisions cannot be completely understood until the filmmaker/researcher is in the field, by examining some actual examples from recent documentary films we can begin to understand the connections between the theoretical questions raised regarding ethical filmmaking/research and the actual practice of making a documentary film.

The particular examples that I will draw upon come from a recent public forum debate on the topic of "Ethics in Documentary Filmmaking". The Canadian Independent Film Caucus (CIFIC) sponsored this event, held in Vancouver B.C. on March 26, 2002. Several documentary filmmakers participated in a panel discussion in which they shared some specific examples of ethical dilemmas they have faced during the making of their films. After presenting clips from their films that illustrated particular ethical issues that had come up during the production of their films, the panelists shared their ways of dealing with the issues and answered questions from the audience regarding ethical filmmaking practices.

Several topics of the forum paralleled some of the issues raised in the earlier sections of this thesis. These included filmmaker deception, collaborative projects and competing filmmaker responsibilities. The three filmmakers from the panel that I will be discussing are Nettie Wild, Mark Achbar, and David Paperny. In the name of reflexivity, I will also include a short discussion of some ethical concerns relating to my own documentary videos in the final section.

Case 1: Nettie Wild's Intentions

Ethics swing around and around!
(Nettie Wild, CIFIC Ethics Forum, 3/26/02)

During the production of her film "A Place Called Chiapas" (1998), Nettie Wild faced several ethical dilemmas relating to her intentions as a filmmaker and the deception she found necessary to use in order to make the film. The controversial nature of her film, which relates to the Zapatista movement in Southern Mexico, had the potential for endangering her subjects as well as herself and her crew. There were many situations in which she was filming in hostile circumstances, including confrontations with armed militia and interviews with suspected murderers. The volatile nature of the filming environment required Wild to make ethical decisions, not necessarily based on theoretical guidelines, but rather on her own experiences in the field.

In several instances, Wild felt the need to partially conceal her intentions from some of the subjects. Instead of disclosing the slant of the film, Wild remained vague and general about the film's topic. While acquiring release forms prior to filming, Wild sometimes mislead the subjects about the angle that she was taking on the issues by changing the title of the film indicated on the consent forms to "Modern Mexico Today". Although this may not be considered a lie since the working title was merely a broader version of the final title, by downplaying her reasons for making the film, Wild's actions can be considered deceptive.

But was this deception necessary for the making of the film? Wild's intentions for making the film were to expose the audience to issues that were going on in the world that perhaps were not being clearly understood by her intended audience. In a

journalistic vein, Wild wanted to expose atrocities that were being ignored. Like the social reform documentary films that Jay Ruby discusses, Wild made the film with good intentions. In order to protect the lives of her subjects and her crew, she decided to compromise full disclosure of the title based on the context in which she was working. Rather than following a specific code of ethics that was laid out before she began filming, Wild carefully weighed her options in the field and decided on a compromise that she felt comfortable with ethically.

Wild's justification for not completely revealing her intentions centered on placing the safety of the subjects and crew above total honesty. She felt that had she actually told her subjects the truth about the slant she wanted to put on the film, it would have endangered lives. According to Wild, without deceit the film would have been impossible to make.

Nettie Wild's case of using deception to cover up good intentions can possibly be seen as the means justifying the end. However, the severity of the ethical offense should also be considered. Using a vague working title on release forms to ensure the safety of those involved in the project can not be considered a major breach in filmmaking ethics. Even though some theorists, such as Jay Ruby, might argue that any amount of deception is unethical, by placing Wild's decision in context, her compromise becomes ethically acceptable in my opinion.

Case 2: Mark Achbar's Relationship with Subjects

You don't have to tell the whole truth, but you have to tell the truth. You can't lie. You can't lie to someone when you're getting their cooperation and putting them in front of the camera.

(Mark Achbar, CIFIC Ethics Forum, 3/26/02)

In his latest documentary film, *Two Brides and a Scalpel: Diary of a Lesbian Marriage* (1999), Mark Achbar approached his relationship with his subjects keeping ethical issues in mind. The film chronicles the lives of Linda Fraser and Georgie Scott during a critical period of their trans-gendered relationship. After the two were married as heterosexuals in 1997, Georgie underwent gender reassignment surgery, making the couple Canada's first legally married same sex partners.

Because of the personal nature of the topic, Achbar wanted to assure that the subjects would be protected from any negative effects that being featured in a documentary might cause in their lives. Achbar and Linda Fraser had been neighbors, and had already established a trusting relationship. This enabled Achbar to turn the project into a collaborative effort.

Linda and Georgie were given a video camera and editorial control of the film. Most of the footage was shot by the subjects themselves, who documented important events and daily routines, which resulted in a sixty-hour collection of video diaries. Back in the editing room, Achbar reviewed the footage and put the piece together, constantly checking with Linda and Georgie to see if his portrayal of their lives was consistent with how they wanted to be represented.

Achbar wanted the film to be an intimate portrayal of Linda and Georgie's unique situation. By turning the film into a collaborative project, Achbar felt that the subject's

lives could be presented in a more respectful manner. He also felt that by including the subjects in the filmmaking process, he could produce a more personal documentary.

This case of Mark Achbar giving control of the camera to the subjects reflects some of Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's ideas on collaborative research projects. By giving the subjects the power to create their own images of themselves, the filmmaker /researcher can usually avoid the ethical problem of misrepresentation. With the subjects in charge of deciding what is worthy to capture on film, the documentary ends up being a more accurate account of their lives.

Case 3: David Paperny's Responsibilities

*If you don't get the release in advance, your subject wins.
(David Paperny, CIFIC Ethics Forum, 3/26/02)*

David Paperny produces a television documentary series shown on the movie channel Showcase called *Kink*. The show "explores the topic of alternative sexuality" (Showcase Network, 2003: <http://www.showcase.ca/series>) and features individuals from the Vancouver community who share their private lives with the audience. *Kink* blends personal interviews with *cinema verite* style footage to create its reality-based documentary series for television.

The ethical challenge that David Paperny faces is finding footage that will be interesting for an audience as well as protecting the subjects who are opening up their lives to the camera. In some situations, the loyalty that Paperny has to his audience to produce an entertaining show conflicts with his loyalty to the subjects of the documentary. In these cases, Paperny must make ethical decisions relating to his responsibilities as a filmmaker.

In one particular episode of *Kink*, a subject named Stephen disclosed on camera that he was HIV positive. Prior to shooting, he had signed a life story agreement, giving the show permission to use any footage they shot of him. However, since his on camera discussion of his HIV status seemed extremely personal to the producers, Paperny talked with Stephen about whether or not that footage should be included. Although he had some reservations about it, Stephen agreed to allow the footage in the show.

However, since the show has rerun on television several times, some of Stephen's friends and family are finding out about his HIV status through the program. Even

though he thought that he was prepared for the consequences of airing such a disclosure on television, Stephen later revealed mixed feelings about his decision to allow the footage on the show. Paperny also had some doubts about the choice they had made saying, "I feel bad about that, even though after we taped it we decided together to put that in. But, I don't think that either of us knew the impact it would have on his life" (Paperny, CIFIC Ethics Forum 2002).

David Paperny's case shows how conflicting responsibilities can sometimes produce harmful results. Since he felt the need to make Stephen's story interesting for the audience, Paperny included Stephen's personal information, albeit with his permission. There were consequences that neither one of them had expected. Even though Paperny may have considered his ethical responsibilities and took actions that the American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics would support, ultimately he was not able to protect the subject of his documentary from the negative effects caused by his appearance on the show.

Case 4: Lea Hartzell's Presentation to the Audience

You should be aware of the ambiguity of images, and also of the diversity of possible responses in your viewers. Estimations of morality and immorality are themselves extremely complicated. In addition, how you choose to contextualize your representation is also indeterminate and, like life itself, will always admit a plurality of interpretations
[Barbash and Taylor, 1997: 59].

In my own experience making several documentary videos, I have run into some ethical dilemmas that have caused me to reflect upon the ways in which I present my work to an audience. In the following section, I will discuss two documentary videos that I have made, *Teaching English or Teaching Culture?* (1999) And *El Jefe, La Gente* (2001), and the ethical issues that arose in relation to presentation of these films to an audience and viewer interpretation of them.

Teaching English or Teaching Culture? is a ten-minute documentary video which I made in collaboration with another anthropology undergraduate student as part of my senior thesis project for my Bachelor's degree in anthropology at the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1999. The video consists of found footage from documentary and fiction films, as well as interviews with several professors of anthropology, education and linguistics. During the making of the film, I also visited an English as a Second Language (ESL) class at the local adult school where I observed classroom activities and held several informal interviews with various students from the class.

The students in the ESL class came from various countries and each was at a different proficiency level of English. The purpose of interviewing the ESL students was to find out their motivations for learning English and to explore their thoughts on the broader topics of the globalization of the language. Many students expressed their

frustration with American culture and the English language taking over their home countries. With the growing tourist industry in Mexico and Central America, several students felt that they could not get a good job in their own country unless they learned English. One student from Costa Rica explained that the necessity of learning English made her uncomfortable and that she felt the young people in her country were losing some of their culture due to the influence of English and American culture.

All of the interviews that I conducted were given in English. Some parts of the interviews are very difficult to understand, due to the low English proficiency level of some of the students. Although what they were saying was sometimes very profound, their ability to express themselves clearly was hindered in some ways by their lack of English language skills.

In my decision to include these interviews, I weighed the content of what the students were saying with the manner in which they presented their thoughts. However, it is possible that some viewers may subconsciously discount what the students say based on their comprehensibility levels. It is possible that some viewers of the video may believe that the thoughts expressed by the professors are more accurate, not necessarily because what they say is more valid, but because they have a better command of English.

As the maker of the documentary, it is my responsibility to think about the ways in which a viewer could interpret the subjects and the possible alternatives available. For example, how would the video be viewed differently if the interviews were given in the native language of the students with English subtitles on screen? Would this change the ways in which the audience viewed the subjects? Although it is impossible to predict all the interpretations that a viewer could potentially have of a subject's interview, by

considering the consequences of including certain footage and weighing the possible alternatives, the filmmaker/researcher upholds her ethical responsibility to the subjects.

In 2001, I spent six weeks in Cuba where I shot over fifteen hours of video footage. Upon my return to North America, I edited the footage into a ten-minute documentary of images and music that represented my experience there, *called El Jefe, La Gente ("Fidel" and the people)*. Without an intended audience in mind, I created the video as a visual memoir for myself. After eventually showing it to friends and family, I expanded my audience to include documentary filmmakers and anthropology professors who had known about my trip.

Reactions to the images varied according to each individual's experiences. Viewers who were familiar with Latin American culture and the socio-political context of Cuba saw the images that the documentary presented in a much different light than those without these perspectives. In regard to audience interpretation, two images in particular raised some ethical questions for me.

The first shot of the video is of a young boy, dressed in a green military hat and black boots, playing with a toy gun in front of his block apartment building. When I shot this footage, I was thinking about the interesting combination of such a child dressed in a grown man's outfit. However, viewing an image of a young child dressed in an army uniform holding a toy gun, in the context of a documentary about Cuba, may conjure up unintended connections between children, the military, and Revolution.

Another scene that provoked unintended reactions from viewers featured a cockfight in which two roosters with razor blades strapped to their feet fought each other

in a caged arena. This event can be seen in many different ways. To the Cuban men who were participating in it, cockfighting can be seen as an entertaining, social event. However, to a viewer who is not familiar with such cultural activities, it can be viewed as a violent display of cruelty towards animals.

As John Berger discusses, each individual sees images in a different way (Berger 1972). Even I experienced the little boy with his gun and the Cuban cockfight differently when I was shooting it, when I was editing it and when I was watching the final piece in a room with an audience. I was not able to anticipate the various reactions to those two scenes prior to making the video. However, by paying attention to the reactions of the viewers and listening to the audience's feedback about the different ways they are interpreting the images, a filmmaker can have a better understanding of how the context in which an image is shown affects its reception by the viewer.

Conclusion

*In the end, since the dignity of others is best protected by a well-informed conscience, sober consideration of our ethical obligations may serve to impress all of us – beginner and old pro – with the power we carry around when we pick up a camera.
[Pryluck 1976: 29]*

The ethical issues that are involved in making a documentary film or conducting anthropological research are endless. With each day of working on a project, filmmakers and researchers are faced with moral dilemmas that may seem almost crippling. It is always possible to think of another person who needs to be considered or of more potential harm that can come to the people who are involved.

However, the benefits that come from documentary films and anthropological research far outweigh the potential negative effects. Ultimately, both are quests for a greater knowledge of humanity and a better understanding of ourselves and those around us. Thinking about ethics during the process of research and filmmaking should heighten our awareness of how our actions effect others, without making us feel paralyzed. It is easy to get weighed down by discussions of ethics and to walk away with a feeling of helplessness. Rather than feeling like there is no possible way to make a documentary film in an ethical way, I would like to propose a different approach.

Perhaps as long as a filmmaker or researcher thinks about the ethics of her actions while she is carrying out her project, she is acting in an ethical way. Thoughtfulness and reflection bring about conscious actions, whereas the act of following strict guidelines often leads to robotic, mindless behaviour. Ultimately, it is the filmmaker who must consider each ethical issue individually and make decisions based on the specific circumstances of her project. The beauty of documentary film is the creative nature of its

form and the power of expression it provides. By allowing the filmmaker the freedom to take images from reality and present them in a subjective way, the art of documentary has the power to change lives and societies for the better. But let us not forget, that along with this great power that documentary film holds, comes the duty of the filmmaker to use that power responsibly.

REFERENCES

- Achbar, Mark. 1999. *Two Brides and a Scalpel: Diary of a Lesbian Marriage*. Invisible Hand Productions Incorporated.
- American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics. 1998. Electronic document.
<http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethcode.htm>.
- Asch, Timothy. 1992. "The Ethics of Ethnographic Film-Making." in *Film as Ethnography*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.
- Banks, Marcus. 2001. *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Barbash, Ilisa and Lucien Taylor. 1997. *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Barnard, Alan and Jonathan Spencer (Eds.). 1996. *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Routledge.
- Becker, Howard. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Berger, John. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.
- Carelli, Vincent. 1988. "Video in the Villages: Utilization of Videotapes as an Instrument of Ethnic Affirmation among Brazilian Indian Groups." *Commission on Visual Anthropology Newsletter*, May, pp. 10-15.

Drew, Robert. 1960. *Primary*. Drew Associates. Santa Monica, CA: Direct Cinema, Ltd. [distributor].

Ethics in Documentary Film Forum. May 26, 2002. Canadian Independent Film Caucus. Vancouver.

Flaherty, Robert. 1922. *Nanook of the North*. Claremont, CA: Criterion Collection [distributor].

Flaxman, Gregory. 2000. *The Brain is the Screen*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ginsburg, Faye. 1995. "Production Values: Indigenous Media and the Rhetoric of Self-Determination" in *Rhetorics of Self-Making* (Ed.) Debbora Battaglia. Los Angeles: University of California Press. 121-138.

Hansen, Miriam. 1991. "Chameleon and Catalyst: The Cinema as an Alternative Public Sphere" in *Babel and Babylon*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 90-125.

Hansen, Miriam. 1995. "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere" in *Viewing Positions* (Eds.) Linda Williams. New Brunswick: Rutgers University. 134-152.

Hartzell, Lea. 2001. *El Jefe, La Gente*.

Hartzell, Lea. 1998. *Teaching English Or Teaching Culture?*

Kuklick, Henrika. 1991. *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Littman, Lynne. 1983. *Number Our Days*. Santa Monica, CA: Direct Cinema, Ltd. [distributor].

- Mannes, Marya. 1955. "The Hot Documentary". *The Reporter*. Nov. 17.
- Michaels, Eric. 1987. *For a Cultural Future: Francis Jupurrurla Makes TV at Yuendumu*. Melbourne: Art and Criticism Monograph Series.
- Myerhoff, Barbara. 1980. *Number Our Days*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- National Association for the Practice of Anthropology Ethical Guidelines for Practitioners. 1988. Electronic document. <http://www.aaanet.org/napa/code.htm>.
- O'Rourke, Denis. 1987. *Cannibal Tours*. O'Rourke And Associates. Santa Monica, CA: Direct Cinema, Ltd. [distributor].
- Pink, Sarah. 2001. *Doing Visual Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pryluck, Calvin. 1976. "Ultimately We Are All Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filming". *Journal of the University Film Association* 33:21-29.
- Rami, Sam. 2002. *Spiderman*. Sony Pictures [distributor].
- Rothman, William. 1997. *Documentary Film Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rouch, Jean & Edgar Morin. 1961. *Chronicle of a Summer*. Brooklyn, NY: First Run/Icarus Films [distributor].
- Ruby, Jay. 2000. *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sarris, Andrew. 1963. *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions*. New York: Dutton.

Showcase Network. 2003. Electronic document. <http://www.showcase.ca/series/>

Te Awekotuku, Ngahuia. 1991. *He Tikanga Whakaaro. Research Ethics in the Maori Community*. Wellington: Manatu Maori.

Turner, Terence. 1992. "Defiant Images: the Kayapo Appropriation of Video"
Anthropology Today 8 (6): 5-15.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 2001. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People*. London: Zed Books.

Wild, Nettie. 1998. *A Place Called Chiapas*. Canada Wild Productions Ltd. New York, NY: Zeitgeist Films [distributor].

Wild, Nettie. 2002. *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City*. Canada Wild Productions Ltd.

Wiseman, Frederick. 1969. *Titicut Follies*. Cambridge, MA: Ziporah Films Inc.

Worth, Sol and John Adair. 1972. *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration of Film Communication and Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.