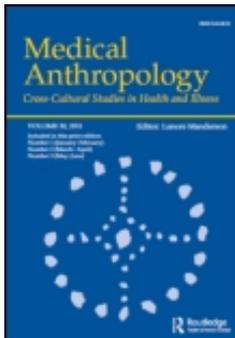


<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9787>

## Ethics, Epistemology, and Engagement: Encountering Values in Medical Anthropology -- A special issue of Medical Anthropology

2015-02-13 11:07:09

By Aaron Seaman



The first issue of Medical Anthropology in 2015 is a special issue, entitled “[Ethics, Epistemology, and Engagement: Encountering Values in Medical Anthropology](#).” In their eponymous [introduction](#) to the issue, Hansjörg Dilger, Susann Huschke, and Dominik Mattes write:

The contributions of this special issue discuss moments of uncertainty and friction that researchers experience regarding the ethicality of their research. They render transparent how, as anthropologists, we sometimes feel overwhelmed, inadequate, and challenged to decide how to behave in moral and ethical ways, and may even doubt the value of conducting fieldwork on certain topics at all. Asking these questions—and not silencing them in scholarly discussions and texts in our desire ‘to make it all right’—is crucial for the discipline, though knowing that any possible answer will always be partial, subjective, and in need of continuous modification.

Information about the issue’s six articles follows below.

### [Anthropology, Ethical Dissonance, and the Construction of the Object](#)

*Sylvie Fainzang*

In this article, I discuss certain questions relating to the ethical difficulties faced by anthropologists when dealing with two different social groups and when one group holds a position of dominance

over the other. In the first example, I draw on my work on doctor-patient relationships in France; in the second, on a study on reproduction in immigrant African families from Mali and Senegal, living in polygynous households in France. I use these examples to explore questions of positionality, beneficence, and potential harm. I show the choices I made in order to construct an epistemologically ethical object.

### [Voice, Boundary Work, and Visibility in Research on Sex Work in Morocco](#)

*Anne Montgomery*

How might the ethnographer conduct research on health and suffering among populations who would rather remain hidden? Drawing on my research with female sex workers in southern Morocco, I suggest and demonstrate an approach that allows interlocutors' discretionary practices to guide ethnographic inquiry. I show how boundary work—as a politics of visibility founded on practices of discretion, concealment, and distancing—emerged as central to my interlocutors' livelihood strategies and their efforts to enact moral personhood, integrate themselves into networks of solidarity, and articulate social critiques. A methodological focus on discourses and practices of boundary drawing, I argue, was essential for conceptualizing and representing the suffering of the women with whom I worked. Using boundary work as a guide, the ethnographer does not give voice to suffering, but learns how suffering is already voiced as part of attempts to survive, aspire, and become.

### [Troubling Objectivity: The Promises and Pitfalls of Training Haitian Clinicians in Qualitative Research Methods](#)

*Pierre Minn*

Building research capacity is a central component of many contemporary global health programs and partnerships. While medical anthropologists have been conducting qualitative research in resource-poor settings for decades, they are increasingly called on to train “local” clinicians, researchers, and students in qualitative research methods. In this article, I describe the process of teaching introductory courses in qualitative research methods to Haitian clinicians, hospital staff, and medical students, who rarely encounter qualitative research in their training or practice. These trainings allow participants to identify and begin to address challenges related to health services delivery, quality of care, and provider-patient relations. However, they also run the risk of

perpetuating colonial legacies of objectification and reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge and knowledge production. As these trainings increase in number and scope, they offer the opportunity to reflect critically on new forms of transnational interventions that aim to reduce health disparities.

### [Giving Back: Activist Research with Undocumented Migrants in Berlin](#)

*Susann Huschke*

In this article, I draw on my doctoral field work in Berlin (2008–2010), on the illness experiences of undocumented Latin American labor migrants, and on my work as an activist for the Berlin-based nongovernmental organization Medibüro, an anti-racist migrant health organization. I highlight how my attempts to ‘give back,’ and the various forms of engagements and commitments that resulted from it, shaped my relationships with actors in the field, the data I gathered, and the analytical framework I employed. I offer solutions on how to address these (unintended) effects of activism, and highlight the unique potential of activist research in regard to the forms of data available to the researcher and in gaining and retaining field access. By probing into some of its concrete methodological and analytical implications, I explore how to do activist research.

### [The Emotional, Political, and Analytical Labor of Engaged Anthropology Amidst Violent Political Conflict](#)

*Rosa Cordillera Castillo*

Given the harsh realities that people live through in southern Philippines, where there is rife human rights violations and violent political conflict, it becomes difficult and arguably unethical for anthropologists to assume a position of neutrality. Following calls for engaged anthropology, I contend that engagement entails simultaneously an emotional, political, and analytical labor and troubles the separation of the self and other. I suggest that a way to labor through these challenges of researching suffering, and the reciprocal obligations this implicates, is to utilize feminist reflexivity and epistemic reflexivity. These necessitate an objectification of the self and one’s intellectual field to achieve an epistemological break that would lead to an understanding of the other and their realities.

### [Emotion Work, Ethnography, and Survival Strategies on the Streets of](#)

Yogyakarta

Thomas Stodulka

Anthropological research with street-related children, adolescents, and young adults raises epistemological, methodical, and ethical predicaments. In this article, I illustrate the advantages of an anthropology that acknowledges the ethnographer's emotions as valuable data when conducting research with marginalized communities. By drawing on my own experiences when conducting long-term fieldwork, I argue that systematic self-reflexivity and an emotionally aware epistemology enhance both the anthropologist's emotional literacy and his or her understanding of informants and interlocutors. The integration of the ethnographer's emotions in the analysis and interpretation of ethnographic data can assist in formulating anthropological theory, challenging the limits of traditional empiricism, and raising emotions to a category of epistemic value.

**AMA citation**

Seaman A. Ethics, Epistemology, and Engagement: Encountering Values in Medical Anthropology -- A special issue of Medical Anthropology. *Somatosphere*. 2015. Available at: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=9787>. Accessed February 13, 2015.

**APA citation**

Seaman, Aaron. (2015). *Ethics, Epistemology, and Engagement: Encountering Values in Medical Anthropology -- A special issue of Medical Anthropology*. Retrieved February 13, 2015, from Somatosphere Web site: <http://somatosphere.net/?p=9787>

**Chicago citation**

Seaman, Aaron. 2015. Ethics, Epistemology, and Engagement: Encountering Values in Medical Anthropology -- A special issue of Medical Anthropology. *Somatosphere*. <http://somatosphere.net/?p=9787> (accessed February 13, 2015).

**Harvard citation**

Seaman, A 2015, *Ethics, Epistemology, and Engagement: Encountering Values in Medical Anthropology -- A special issue of Medical Anthropology*, *Somatosphere*. Retrieved February 13, 2015, from <<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9787>>

**MLA citation**

Seaman, Aaron. "Ethics, Epistemology, and Engagement: Encountering

Values in Medical Anthropology -- A special issue of Medical Anthropology." 13 Feb. 2015. Somatosphere. Accessed 13 Feb. 2015.<<http://somatosphere.net/?p=9787>>