

Title: Ethical Perspectives for Community Decision-making on Scientific Risks

Bio: Dianne Quigley is a researcher and doctoral candidate, concentrating in ethics in the Religious Studies department at Syracuse University. Ms. Quigley is the principal investigator of a grant from the National Institute on Health titled “Collaborative Initiative for Research Ethics in Environmental Health” (Year 2000-2006). She holds a Master’s Degree from Clark University, Worcester, MA in the Environment, Science and Policy Program. Currently, Ms. Quigley is also a visiting instructor at Brown University, RI in research ethics with the Environmental Studies Department.

Overview of Presentation:

Scientific risk decisions are guided by ethical approaches that favor individual rights over community needs and rights. The right to pursue individual freedoms and the freedom of scientific inquiry for individual researchers are often not bounded by ethical obligations to communities affected by science and research.. In this talk, I will introduce participants to other ethical approaches that value a strong role for the community in dealing with morally complex issues in health and science. A description of these theories will be followed by examples of how these theories can be put into both decision-making and research practices in the field of environmental health.

1. Extending Biomedical Principle Ethics to Community Protections

Participants will be acquainted with the important principles of beneficence, respect for autonomy (informed consent) and justice and how these guidelines can be extended to community protections. They represent a justification for communities in requiring ethical obligations of government or industrial contractors accountable to the community for health protection.

2. Communitarian and Virtue Ethics

I will describe the important tenets of these ethical theories which point to a severe loss of communal values from excessive individualism and the overtaking of community life by vertical forces (corporate, military, government, market forces) that have weakened the horizontal ties of community. These theories discuss important needs for restoring the moral voice of community by (1) gaining consensus on core values of community life (2) balancing individual autonomy with a thicker social order of shared values (3) discussing the importance of community histories, traditions, conceptions of the good life for building practices of virtuous behavior needed for a shared conception of the good.

3. Postmodern Ethics

Postmodern ethics provides important ethical reflection on issues of diversity, otherness and an openness to move out of our own ordered constructions of reality. Excerpts from these philosophers will ask us to be conscious of language, power, privilege and the unconscious suppression of otherness. It helps us to come into other ways of seeing possibilities of change among pluralistic demands and to be willing to seek ethics in conversations, situational contexts and negotiations.

4. Indigenous Ethics

Contributions from indigenous ethics discuss how science in Native traditions, emerged from community and its daily/seasonal relatedness with natural forces. It highlights the importance of community as the most enduring form of civilization and that “community embedded knowledge” is gained from our daily interactions with our environment.. Examples of how indigenous ethics created new visions for risk assessment and environmental studies will be demonstrated.

After briefly stating the highlights of these ethical theories, I will present a list of research harms that have occurred by scientists with primarily an individualistic tradition. This will be followed by the emerging principles/practices of community-based research that are being utilized by communities with environmental health problems across the country. These principles can guide community members in coming together with academics and scientists to negotiate and require accountability to a community moral voice and community needs and values.