Folklore is a humanistic study. As such, it has an ethical responsibility to the humanity with which it is concerned. Especially now that the scope of folklore studies is expanding, folklorists need to be sensitized to the need for ethical research. The purpose of this paper is to discuss ethical sensitivity and to suggest ways in which folklorists can go about acquiring it.

Archer Taylor has labelled Kaarle Krohn's *Die Folkloristische Arbeitsmethode* as "the first systematic attempt to state a method of studying folkloristic materials." Krohn's principal ethical concern in this work was to find ways of insuring that the materials that folklorists studied were legitimately "folk." Noticeably lacking, however, is a discussion of methods of field collecting and related problems.

Since Krohn, many other scholars have produced handbooks for folklore research. One of the most useful for modern folklorists is Kenneth Goldstein's *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*. Goldstein explicitly sets out to discuss the problems of dealing with people -- the problems facing folklorists who are in the field, trying to record materials. Goldstein is primarily interested in folksong collecting, but his methods apply across a broad range of folkloristic endeavors.

In his fifth chapter, "Rapport Establishment and Maintenance," Goldstein suggests that it would be best for a fieldworker not to deceive informants about his intentions. He stresses, in addition, that a fieldworker must protect informants "as they see fit." He argues that "while scientific honesty and objectivity demand that he (the collector) omit no pertinent data, moral courtesy demands that he not identify his informants with certain data." He concludes:

But whichever solutions the collector arrives at when presenting and interpreting his data, the course open to him in the field must be a basically honest one. He must not deceive his informants merely to obtain their materials, and then turn around after he has left the field to connect them with materials with which they would not care to be identified. Indeed, the problem here is not only one of honesty and ethics, but rather of a realistic consideration of the effects of such an action on future collecting projects. Not only will the collector make it impossible for himself to return to that area, but he may also make it impossible for any other collector to work there for many years to come.

Unfortunately, not all folklorists have followed Goldstein's advice. Occasionally studies are published in which informants' identities are included -- studies of materials which could get the informants in trouble with certain authorities. This is especially a problem now that folklorists have begun to study legally-proscribed groups (addicts, prostitutes, etc.) or activities. Special caution must be exercised in this area. Even the press is now legally required to reveal the sources of its information, but many reporters go to jail rather than doing so. A folklorist should have at least as high a regard for an informant's privacy. There are some ethical problems that Goldstein does not consider, however. Some of these concern the sources of funding for
fieldwork and their public disclosure. Other problems involve the issue of who has access to the material that the fieldworker collects—and to what use the material will be put by those who have access to it.

In the 1960's, especially after the invasion of Cambodia, it became known that some anthropologists were carrying on political espionage against the countries they were studying. The United States government, especially through the CIA, had also secretly hired a number of behavioral scientists (including anthropologists) to work in foreign countries gathering information which was then reported only to governmental agencies. This information was used to support political/military efforts such as the invasion of Cambodia. Charles Frantz' The Student Anthropologist's Handbook has an extensive discussion of some of the factors involved in this issue and includes an excellent bibliography on it. The handbook also confronts the general problem of ethics in behavioral research and can be a useful reference tool for folklorists for other matters, such as funding or museum work.

As a result of this controversy, the American Anthropological Association has drawn up and adopted "Statements on Ethics," and also rules and procedures for a grievance process against anthropologists. The American Folklore Society has endorsed the AAA's guidelines, making them, in effect, those for folklorists as well. The "Statements of Ethics" of the AAA/APS outline six basic responsibilities of professionals, especially those doing fieldwork:

1. Relations with those studied: In research, an anthropologist's paramount responsibility is to those he studies. When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. The anthropologist must do everything within his power to protect their physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor their dignity and privacy.

2. Responsibility to the public: The anthropologist is also responsible to the public—all presumed consumers of his professional efforts. To them he owes a commitment to candor and to truth in the dissemination of his research results and in the statement of his opinions as a student of man.

3. Responsibility to the discipline: a. An anthropologist should undertake no secret research or any research whose results cannot be freely derived and publicly reported. b. He should avoid even the appearance of engaging in clandestine research, by fully and freely disclosing the aims and sponsorship of all his research.

4. Responsibility to students: In relations with students, an anthropologist should be candid, fair, nonexploitative and committed to their welfare and academic progress. Beyond honest teaching, the anthropologist as a teacher has ethical responsibilities in selection, instruction in ethics, career counseling, academic supervision, evaluation, compensation and placement.

5. Responsibility to sponsors: In his relations with sponsors of research, an anthropologist should be honest about his qualifications, capabilities and aims. He thus faces the obligation, prior to entering any commitment for research, to reflect sincerely upon the purposes of his sponsors in terms of their past behavior. He should be especially careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions contrary to his professional ethics or competing commitments. This requires that he require of the sponsor full disclosure of the sources of funds, personnel, aims of the institution and the research project, disposition of research results.
6. Responsibilities to one's own government and to host governments: ... No secret research, no secret reports or debriefings of any kind should be agreed or given....

The AAA/APS has also established a grievance procedure by which complaints against professionals are to be processed. This is a standing Committee on Ethics which functions in a quasi-legal fashion and can recommend sanctions against offenders. However, the Committee on Ethics mechanism only operates after a grievance has been alleged.

Psychologists have developed a more elaborate procedure for insuring ethical behavior on the part of researchers. This procedure has been codified by the American Psychological Association in "Ethical Standards of Psychologists." Under the standards of the APA, greater emphasis is placed on insuring that a subject (informant) is not harmed through the very process of giving information. (With reference to folk song collecting--to take a relevant example--this would roughly correspond to a researcher's insuring that an informant's health would not suffer from the exertion of singing a song.)

Psychologists became embroiled in a serious ethical controversy in 1963 when Stanley Milgram published a study of "destructive obedience in the laboratory." In this study, subjects were ordered to administer increasingly severe shocks to a victim in another room. According to Milgram:

The procedure created extreme levels of nervous tension in some Ss. Profuse sweating, trembling, and stuttering were typical expressions of this emotional disturbance. One unexpected sign of tension--yet to be explained--was the regular occurrence of nervous laughter, which in some Ss developed into uncontrollable seizures.

Additionally, even after the subjects had been told that they had not really administered any shocks, many subjects expressed a feeling of guilt--over the fact that they would obey such orders without question. The publication of this study lead many researchers to accuse Milgram of violating the code of ethical standards for psychologists.

Continuing controversies of this type in all of the social sciences finally lead the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare to establish a policy on the protection of human subjects in research funded by the DHEW. This policy creates a mechanism by which a researcher's fieldwork plans are reviewed for ethical problems before the researcher comes into contact with subjects. The policy established by the DHEW states in part:

...No grant or contract for an activity involving human subjects shall be made unless the application for such support has been reviewed and approved by an appropriate institutional committee.

This review shall determine that the rights and welfare of the subjects involved are adequately protected, that the risks to an individual are outweighed by the potential benefits to him or by the importance of the knowledge to be gained, and that informed consent is to be obtained by methods that are adequate and appropriate.

In addition the committee must establish a basis for continuing review of the activity in keeping with these determinations.
The result of this has been that in many psychology departments, a standing Ethics Committee has been created that reviews research proposals for all experiments involving human subjects. It is important to note that this Ethics Committee reviews all proposals—whether made by a full professor or an undergraduate, whether funded by the LHEW or the pocket book of the experimenter.

The administrative apparatus for this is quite simple. It is established departmental policy that no one in the department conducts research involving human subjects without filling out an "Experiment Approval Form." The form may ask: (1) the title of the experiment; (2) the names of every person who will have contact with the subjects; (3) other miscellaneous questions about the experimental design, goals, etc.; and (4) a question phrased something like this: "Are there any deceptive, threatening, or 'objectionable' aspects to your study? (e.g., shock, failure, or other negative experimental treatments; scales dealing with taboo; deprivation; hypnosis; etc.) If so, describe in detail." When completed by the experimenter, this form is given to the chairperson of the Ethics Committee. If the answer to the last question is "none," the chairperson signs the form and the experimenter may proceed. The chairperson also makes sure that all of the people who come in contact with the subjects are trained (or at least briefed) in ethical experimental practices. If there are "objectionable" aspects, the chairperson passes the form on to other members of the committee for an opinion. If the members agree that the experiment is too objectionable, the full committee meets with the experimenter to discuss the experimental design. Usually, slight changes in the experiment can solve the problem. Rarely, the committee must forbid an experiment.

The advantages to this type of procedure should be obvious. Ethical problems are raised and solved before the researcher comes in contact with the subjects. This approach would seemingly make the AAA/AFS after-the-fact grievance procedure unnecessary. The administrative structure is simple. There is much less of a chance that tender egos will suffer. And, most importantly, this process should guarantee that subjects will escape unethical treatment.

What has this to do with folklore? I have two points in mind. First, folklore stands at the convergence of several disciplines—anthropology, sociology, and psychology among them—and more and more, folklorists are engaging in experiments much like those carried on by social psychologists. This is especially true of folklorists studying language use and social interaction. Yet we do not have a mechanism like psychology's to insure that we do not inadvertently harm our informants by unethical research. An example of the kind of study I have in mind, and one which I think has serious ethical problems, was published by sociologist Harold Garfinkel in 1964. In part of a series of studies on social interaction, Garfinkel "assigned" or "instructed" students (i.e., gave them little choice) to perform certain dysfunctional social activities in their homes or among their friends. Garfinkel describes the study and some of its results as follows:

Students were required to spend from fifteen minutes to an hour in their homes imagining that they were boarders and acting out this assumption. They were instructed to conduct themselves in a circumspect and polite fashion. They were to avoid getting personal, to use formal address, to speak only when spoken to....
One mother, infuriated when her daughter spoke to her only when she was spoken to, began to shriek in angry denunciation of the daughter for her disrespect and insubordination and refused to be calmed by the student's sister.

There were no cases in which the situation was not restorable upon the student's explanation. Occasionally, an explanation was accepted, but still it added offense. In several cases students reported that the explanation left them, their families, or both wondering how much of what the student had said was "in character" and how much the student "really meant".

Very few students reported heart-felt relief when the hour was over. They were much more likely to report partial relief. They frequently reported that in response to the anger of others they became angry in return and slipped easily into subjectively recognizable feelings and actions.

This study is quite effective in illustrating how thin is the tissue of our everyday-life expectancies, but I am more concerned about the cost at which this information was obtained.

A second point of direct relevance to folklore is this: each year hundreds of undergraduates in introductory folklore courses (and other folklorists at all academic levels) fan out "into the field" to record folklore. Is there any preliminary review of the nature and procedure of the collecting that these students will be doing? Have they been properly instructed in the ethics of fieldwork? And what is the disposition of these collections once they are turned in? Who has access to them? To what purpose are they put?

What I am arguing for is the establishment of a formal process of institutional review similar to the one called for by the DLHEW. The standards of the AAA/AFS are good, but they do not go far enough. Most folklore projects involve interaction with informants or subjects in one way or another. Therefore, all projects should be reviewed before they begin—to insure that we are not injuring the very people we want to immortalize. To do anything less is to fail in our ethical responsibility to our fellow men.

I would like to see in the pages of the Forum (or in personal communication to me) information about how folklorists around the world are meeting and dealing with their particular ethical dilemmas.

Notes

1. In his foreword to Roger Welsch's translation of Krohn's 1926 work. Its English title is Folklore Methodology (Austin: University of Texas Press for the American Folklore Society, Bibliographical and Special Series, Vol. 21, 1971), see pp. ix-xii.


3. Ibid., pp. 58-59.


