Enriching Bioethics Theory and Practice through Cross-Cultural Engagement

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APBEN Meeting, March 2019
Hong Kong
Overview

• Background: Culture is a Human Universal

• Cross-Cultural Engagement: Practical Implications for Bioethics Education
  – Local contexts and cases

• Implications for Bioethics as a Discipline
  – Ways of Viewing: Interstitium as Metaphor

• Discussion: The Global and the Local
Culture is a Human Universal: Non-dichotomous Visions

• Example: Food
  – The biological need to consume nutrition (eat) is common to human beings
  – What, how, and when one eats is under cultural (+social, historical, economic, environmental) influence
  – Connections to medicine, concepts of health and illness
The Ethics of Food and Eating: Produced at the Intersection of Multiple Levels
The Ethics of Food and Eating: Social, Political, Medical, Legal, Economic
Cross-Cultural Engagement: Practical Implications for Bioethics Education

• What Does it Mean for a Case to be “Local”?  
  – Collaborative project, starting at the first APBEN meeting last year  
  – In progress, at later stages of completion

• The importance of local cases for student engagement and local relevance in bioethics learning
Cases Based in Local Health Care, Economic, and Social Systems

• Cases with a Focus on Justice
• Specific to the real impact of local systems and the ways in which resources are allocated
• Cases
  – Case 1: “Inequality, Health, and Justice through Photos”, Hong Kong, Case contributed by Sara M. Bergstresser, CUHK
  – Case 2: “Resource Allocation in Healthcare”, Sydney, Australia, Case contributed by Stuart Lane, Sydney University
At the Intersection of Health Systems and Cultural Norms and Practices

• Cases with a Focus on “Local Competence”
  – Extending beyond “Cultural Competence”
• Local systems intersecting with social and cultural norms
• Cases
  – Case 3: “Sounds of Silence”, Pakistan Case contributed by Kulsoom Ghias, Aga Khan University
    • Video resource - Centre of Biomedical Ethics and Culture (CBEC) at SIUT in Karachi, Pakistan
  – Case 4: “Patient Consultation in Public and Private Clinical Settings”, Malaysia, Case contributed by Wee-Ming Lau, Monash University, Malaysia
Cases with a Focus on Social Changes and Timely Local Concerns

• Emerging issues of immediate concern in a particular local space
• Often very engaging for students
• Cases
  – Case 5: “Doctors Plead Not Guilty to Manslaughter in a Beauty Clinic Death”, Hong Kong, Case contributed by Isabel Hwang, CUHK
  – Case 6: “Research Ethics and Questionable Publication Practices”, Pakistan, Case contributed by Kulsoom Ghias, Aga Khan University
Implications for Bioethics as a Discipline

• Consider fields that have been disproportionately constructed within particular cultural contexts, and how this may have rendered certain questions and topics invisible

• For bioethics to be a reflection of the ethical experiences and dilemmas faced across the globe, these invisible topics must be found
  – Overall, of benefit not only for the local context newly incorporated, but also for those elsewhere
Ways of Viewing: Interstitium as Metaphor

• Last year, news was made when the application of a novel microscopy technique revealed an extensive and previously unrecognized “interstitium” in human tissues.
• This space had been rendered invisible by past imaging techniques, which relied upon fixed slides for microscopy.
• This interstitium is considered by some to be a new organ, and it has been identified as having potential importance for cancer pathology, for understanding the physiological mechanisms of acupuncture, and for expanding our understanding of the body as an interconnected whole.
Discussion: The Global and the Local

• Ongoing collaborative endeavor that necessarily includes consideration of and respect for different social and cultural contexts

• Relevance for all of humanity should be a central consideration for the future of bioethics as a field

• Global Bioethics as Inherently Local; Global Implications of Local Ethics
Additional Acknowledgements and References

• CUHK
  – Olivia Ngan, HK Ng
  – CUHK Tutorial staff, Administrative staff
  – CUHK Centre for Bioethics

• Columbia
  – Robert Klitzman, Barbra Rothschild,
  – Stephanie Holmquist

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