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Writing Assignment 5

The article “Genetic researchers work to overcome suspicion among indigenous groups” can be found in the Washington Post. The article highlights how researchers are trying to earn the trust of indigenous groups back, as in the past the information collected from these people was often misused. As a result of this, some indigenous groups have banned some researchers from stepping foot on their reservations, while others have banned the use of their DNA through blood sampling in fear of how it will be used. It speaks on how several researchers are trying to earn the trust back, each in their own ways. This is mostly out of fear of indigenous groups being left behind, as many genome scientists believe that health care can be improved with the use of genetic information.

One example of scientists trying to rebuild the connection of researchers and tribes is exhibited by Ripan Malhi. “Malhi said he first observed the misuse of data from indigenous communities, and the distrust on the part of community members, when he was a graduate student in the mid-1990s at the University of Washington. Since then, he has worked hard to change the way students think about research.” (Bhanoo 2020) Another example is of Alyssa Bader who worked with the Metlakatla First Nation in British Colombia to complete her doctoral research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her ancestors were apart of this tribe. She said that sitting down and speaking with the tribe wasn’t just for getting permission, she said “The goal of the project was to integrate a lot of different types of data for it to be about the experience of ancestors.” (Bhanoo 2020) Her research included an abundance of interviews with elders of the tribe about their observations on community dietary changes over periods of time.

There have been other articles, such as “Genetic Research in Native Communities” that have spoken on the misuse of the genetic material of indigenous people. The article states that “Until recently, very few indigenous groups were aware of genetic research. For a Native American tribe in Arizona, what would begin with great promise and build upon relationships established between a respected researcher and an impoverished community would result in increased distrust of “research” and destruction of relationships.” (Santos 2008) They then talked about the case of the Havasupai, an isolated Native American community. Tribal members provided blood samples, handprints, and fingerprints, thinking it was going to be used to help explain the high incidence of type-2 diabetes among the tribe. In the late 1990’s they received no information regarding the study. They believed for the study to be over after a freezer malfunction at ASU that damaged the blood samples. Little did they know some of the samples were salvaged, and their blood was shared with other researchers. There have also been cases of this happening to Native Hawaiians.

Due to the discrepancies in what consent it as far as data collection and distribution, as well as the misuse of data, researchers have tried to improve the process of using proper consent when collecting data. It was stated in “Genetic researchers work to overcome suspicion among indigenous groups” by Ripan Malhi that “In the past, researchers were collecting blood samples and thinking of people as resources, as a way to get what they needed to advance their careers.” These issues have also caused researchers to rebuild the trust of researchers and the indigenous people that have often been mistreated by scientists.

References

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